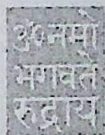


ॐ नमो
भगवते
रुद्राय

Atirudra Mahayajna Kankhal 1981



Chiranjeev Mahapatra
Kolkata, 1981



Atirudra Mahayajna
Kankhal, 1981

Printed in 2007

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Front cover:

Ritviks seated around a kunda with the kundacharya giving an ahuti of ghee; the ghee-filled kalasha, which dripped ghee into the kunda is suspended over it; other ritviks and kundas are seen in the background

**Produced by Poonam Bevli Sahi
FACET Design
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Foreword

Although the word 'yajna' stands for 'activity', not all activities can be termed 'yajna'. It is only those activities that lead to the purity of the physical body, of the senses, and of the ego, and those activities that are performed not because of any worldly desire but for the realisation of the Ultimate Reality that are called 'yajna'.

There was a time when yajna, in its real form, was respected by everyone. However, today because of the lack of deep knowledge, and the non-observance of the proper rules for performing rituals, yajnas retain just their outward form. A yajna performed within the parameters of the rules of the scriptures, and with devotion to the Lord, is the highest example of nishkam karma. This kind of karma does not cause bondage, while the bondages that already exist, are weakened (Gita 3.9 and 4.22). If a yajna is performed correctly then, at the end, Mahajhana, or Ultimate Knowledge, can be achieved.

The inspiration for the Atirudra Mahayajna first arose in the mind of Sw. Purnananda. With the co-operation of the Ashram sisters, and by Shri Shri Anandamayee Ma's kheyal, the Atirudra Mahayajna, was completed in all perfection. Moreover, every person who was present at the Yajna, gained spiritually from it.

Shri Shri Ma said, "Such a yajna takes place in Satyuga." She used to say, "Everything is in everything. Kaliyuga is in Satyuga, and Satyuga is in Kaliyuga."

Shri Shri Ma also said, "A yajna such as this may have never taken place in the past and may not take place in the future."



om namo bhagavate rudrāya



Shri Shri Anandamayee Ma



At the beginning of the Yajna, Shri Shri Ma said that I was to be the yajman of this Yajna, an honour that was granted to me only by Her grace. Shri Shri Ma's kheyal, Sw. Purnanandaji's resolve to do everything as perfectly as possible, and the co-operation of the Ashram sisters, all of which were evident from the beginning of the Yajna up to its purnahuti, were instrumental in the successful completion of this unparalleled Yajna. For this, Sw. Purnananda and the other brahmacharinis deserve our gratitude.

Where Purna-brahma-narayana is present in the form of Yajna-narayana, there is also present Purna, Purna, and Purna.

Those who want to perform a yajna will get much information and guidance from this book. May Bhagavan Ashutosh and Shri Shri Ma shower their divine blessings upon everyone!

*sarve bhavantu sukhinah sarve santu nirāmayāḥ |
sarve bhadraṇi paśyantū mā kaścidduḥkhabhāg bhavet | |*

May all be happy! May all be without disease!
May all perceive the auspicious! May no one partake of sorrow!

*With Divine Blessings of Sw.
Sri Ma*

Swami Bhaskarananda

(Swami Bhaskarananda)



This book has been compiled by Rohini Purang based on the following sources:

1. Books: *Akhanda Mahayajna* by Gurupriya Devi, Shri Shri Anandamayee Charitable Society, Calcutta; *Yagya-mimansa* by Pandit Veniramsharma Gaur, Vaidik Pustakalaya, Varanasi; *Atirudrayajna Mahotsava* by Pandit Vamadeva Mishra, a booklet printed on the occasion by Shri Shri Ma Anandamayee Ashram, Kankhal.

2. Articles: *Rudratatva tatha Rudrayajna* by Km. Gauri Banerjee, *Ma ka Aishwarya* by Km. Gunita, *Ma ka Punya Smaran* by Shri Kamapati Tripathi, *The Ati Rudra Mahayajna at Kankhal* by Shri R. K. Banerjee, all of which appeared in Ananda Varta, as well as Dr. Padma Misra's unpublished, handwritten article.

3. Recollections of a few participating pandits: Dr. Vyas Mishra, Dr. Rama Krishna Mandalikar (Munnuji), Dr. Kailash Chandra Sharma Dave, Dr. Hridaya Ranjan Sharma, Dr. Narayan Mishra, Dr. Kunj Behari Pande, Shri Om Prakash, and Shri Ambarish Kala.

4. Further inputs from the members of the Atirudra Mahayajna Committee, as well as Smt. Vamadeva Mishra, Dr. Patanjali Mishra, Dr. Surya Narayana Nanda, and Dr. Balaji Satpathy.

Note: (1) While translating Ma's words, the effort has been to try to retain the sense and rhythm of the original, for which purpose, at places, the rules of sentence construction may have been ignored. (2) The rituals described in this book are those that were conducted during the Atirudra Mahayajna in 1981 in Kankhal. The order and details of some of them may differ from those conducted in other Atirudra Mahayajnas elsewhere, depending on the tradition an acharya follows.



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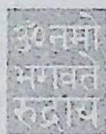


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Introduction

*Namah shambhavaaya cha mayobhavaaya
cha namah shankaraaya cha mayaskaraaya cha
namah shivaaya cha shivataraya cha¹*

An Atirudra Mahayajna was conducted in the year 1981, in the presence of Shri Shri Anandamayee Ma, and with Her blessings, in the Shri Shri Ma Anandamayee Ashram in Kankhal. It commenced on the 6th of May, which was the Shuklapaksha Tritiya of the month of Vaisakh, also called Akshay Tritiya², and concluded eleven

¹ ...*namah śambhavāya ca mayobhavāya ca namah śankarāya ca mayaskarāya ca namah śivāya ca śivatarāya ca...* (...Obeisance to Shambhava, and to Mayobhava, and to Shankara, and to Mayaskara, and to Shiva, and to Shivatara...) These are mantras from the Rudra Ashtadhyayi (Yajur Veda 16-41), the text that was chanted during this Yajna.

² Akshay Tritiya is an extremely auspicious day for conducting any religious or secular activity. It is the third day (tritiya) of the bright half (shuklapaksha) of the Hindu calendar month of Vaishakh (part April - part May).



days later, on the 16th of May. This Yajna was conducted with the aim of seeking the blessings of Rudra³ for the welfare of all Creation.

Several mahatmas, heads of religious organisations, and hundreds of devotees and religious-minded people attended this function. The pradhanacharya⁴, Pandit Vamadeva Mishra, along with a hundred and thirty-four other ritviks⁵, conducted the pujas and havans that formed a part of this grand ritual-worship of Rudra. Accompanied by the mantras of the Rudra Ashtadhyayi⁶, the yajman⁷, Brahmachari Bhaskarananda, and the ritviks offered

³ Rudra, the Vedic deity, has two forms, one fierce and the other compassionate. Both forms are worshipped in a yajna such as this. More details on Rudra can be found in the section bearing the same name, which comes later in this book.

⁴ The pradhanacharya (main acharya) bears the sole responsibility for the scriptural accuracy of the rituals for the duration of the entire function.

⁵ Nirukta 3-4 pada: *ṛtvik kasmāt | iranaḥ | ṛgyaṣṭā bhavatīti sākapuṇih | ṛtuyāji bhavatīti vā |* (A ritvik is one who inspires one to perform a yajna. Mantras from the Rigveda are called 'richah', a word that comes from the Sanskrit root 'rik', meaning 'to praise'. He who performs yajna with richah, is a 'ritvik'. In addition, a ritvik is one who performs yajna in every season, or 'ritu'.)

⁶ This prayer to Rudra has two parts. The first is sometimes called the Namaksukta (because the word 'namah' is repeated in it), and the second the Chamaksukta (because the words 'cha me' are repeated in it). This prayer is found in the Krishna Yajurveda (Taittiriya Samhita) as well as in the Shukla Yajurveda (Vajasaneyi-madhyandina Samhita). Mantras from the latter Veda, viz. chapters 16 (the Namaksukta) and 18 (the Chamaksukta) of the Samhita just mentioned, were employed in this Yajna. (The Rigveda contains a shorter version of this prayer.)

⁷ Shatapatha Brahmana 6-6-3-9: *yadyajate tadyajamānaḥ |* (The one who performs a yajna is a 'yajman'.) The word 'yajman' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'yaj' meaning 'to sacrifice'.



oblations into the eleven kundas⁸ of the specially constructed Sushlisht mandap⁹. Those who carried out the rituals, as well as others who were involved in their preparation and organisation, took utmost care to maintain the highest possible standards of scriptural accuracy and ritual purity at all times. These two factors are extremely vital for the efficacy of karmakanda, or the ceremonies and rituals prescribed in the Vedas.

Emphasising upon the uniqueness of the Yajna, Ma said, "A Yajna like this takes place in Satyuga. You all have seen many big yajnas in the past and will see many in the future, but you may not be able to see one like this. Many yugas pass but a Yajna like this cannot be seen. A yajna such as this may have never taken place in the past, and may not take place in the future. You all are very fortunate that you are present in this Yajna. Whoever has come to have darshan of it has some connection with it." Ma said many other things too, on other occasions, which indicated the great ritual, spiritual and religious significance of this Yajna.

⁸ The fire-pits in which Agni devata is ritually placed and in which havan is carried out.

⁹ The kundas are housed within a special structure called a yajnashala. The interior of the yajnashala is called a mandap. There are several types of mandaps based on their design; Sushlisht is the name of one kind.

¹⁰ This Shiva temple is said to be the site of the yajna held by Daksha (see account below).

¹¹ An account of what happened in the Brihaspati Sava Yajna that Daksha Prajapati organised is recorded in the fourth Skandha of the Shrimadbhagavata. Daksha invited devatas, rishis and other exalted beings to the yajna, but did not invite his son-in-law, Shiva. Brahma and Vishnu were invited but did not attend because they sensed that there would be trouble there. When Shiva heard of Sati's sacrifice at



The proximity of the Anandamayee Ashram to the ancient Daksheshwar Temple¹⁰ in Kankhal was of significance too. Shankaracharya Abhinavsachchidananda Tirtha, head of the Dwarika Sharada Peetha and a special invitee to the function, remarked that by honouring Shiva in this Yajna, Ma had done something that Daksha¹¹ had failed to do at his yajna in ancient times.

the yajna, he was filled with intense grief and anger. He created Veerabhadra, a fierce warrior who, accompanied by his army, went to the site of the yajna, destroyed whatever he could, attacked the ritviks and invitees, put out the fires and throttled Daksha. To rectify the situation in the only way possible, Brahma urged the wounded devatas, ritviks and guests to appeal to Shiva for forgiveness. They apologized to Shiva for not having invited him, and begged him to establish order once again since the yajna had been interrupted and was, by now, completely destroyed. Shiva restored Daksha to life by giving him the head of a goat. He healed the wounded devatas, ritviks and invitees. Order was restored in the yajna premises and Daksha and the ritviks commenced the rituals afresh. With Shiva's grace, they were able to complete the yajna this time.



Atirudra Mahayajna, Kankhal, 1981



Ritviks about to enter the gate leading to the yajnashtala, which can be seen in the background



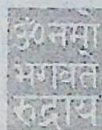
*From left: Dr. Padma Misra, Km. Parul, Shri Shri Anandamayee Ma, Sw. Sevananda (Udasji), Brni. Puruananda, Km. Aruna Pandya
Behind (from left): Dr. Hridaya Ranjan Sharma, Dr. Vamadeva Mishra, Dr. Vyas Mishra, Dr. Ram Nivas Tiwari, Dr. Shivdutt Sharma*



A wooden torana of the temporary yajnasnana



Pandits bringing the kalashas from the Daksheshwar Ghat after filling them and performing the relevant rituals there



I. First Inspiration

In 1980, Shri and Smt. Khaitan, devotees of Ma, had invited Her to Dehra Dun to bless an Atirudra Yajna that they were organising. Ma, along with some members of the Ashram, went to grace the occasion. Pt. Ranganatha, the pradhanacharya, was conducting the yajna with a team of fifty pandits from Varanasi. Witnessing the proceedings in an atmosphere resounding with Vedic mantras, a few brahmacharinis¹² were inspired and exclaimed, "Why can't we do something similar! It would be wonderful if we could also do a yajna like this!" Just then, Agni appeared in the arani¹³ and the Arani

¹² Brahmacharinis are the women members of the Anandamayee Ashram. The brahmacharinis referred to here were Kumari Nirmal Handu, Brahmacharini Purnananda (Kumari Shanta Pathak) and Kumari Aruna Pandya.

¹³ Arani is a wooden device in which fire is produced by the friction of its two parts.



Manthan¹⁴ produced its first sparks. The brahmacharinis thought this to be a good omen and felt encouraged. However, they realised that a yajna of this scale would be very expensive to conduct. To make a beginning, they each decided to contribute towards its cost.

A few hours later, one of the brahmacharinis, Brni. Purnananda, went to Ma's room. Km. Parul Banerjee (another brahmacharini) was there discussing a particular function with Ma, and the money she wanted to donate for it. Brni. Purnananda narrated to Ma the conversation she and her colleagues had had a while ago informing Her about their wish to perform a yajna similar to the one they were attending. Ma was extremely pleased and said "Oh! Is this what the girls have said? Should this sharir then say that the girls will get a yajna done?"¹⁵ Seeing how keen Ma seemed about the Yajna, Brni. Purnananda immediately replied, "Yes, Ma, please say so!"

Ma asked Km. Parul to contribute the sum she had just mentioned for this future event. She told Km. Parul and Brni. Purnananda to take a sankalpa¹⁶ for donating a specific sum towards its expenses. Thus, based on the inspiration and initial contribution of a few brahmacharinis,

¹⁴ The process of creating sparks by friction in the arani is called 'Arani Manthan'. The sparks that are thus produced are used to light the fire in a yajna.

¹⁵ Ma referred to Herself as 'sharir' meaning 'body'. She referred to the young brahmacharinis of the Ashram, in either Bangla or Hindi, as 'girls'.

¹⁶ A sankalpa is a ritual pledge, or resolve, taken by a person about to commence a particular ritual, for instance, a yajna or a dana, stating, amongst other things, his or her desire to perform the ritual and the desired goal to be obtained by its performance. The word is also used, in everyday language, to denote a strong commitment to do something.



the decision to hold the Yajna was taken. This was significant as, even later, it was mostly brahmacharinis who were involved in the preparation and organisation of the Yajna.

Brni. Purnananda had always wished to organise a yajna. A few years earlier, she had had a discussion with Swami Paramananda (a senior sanyasi of the Ashram) on the subject. Swamiji had said that an Atirudra yajna is the best of all yajnas, and that it would require about a lakh of rupees to conduct. This large sum had made the project seem unfeasible at that time. However, it now looked as if Brni. Purnananda's wish was about to come true and the only reason for it was Ma's ready support. The late Shri Kamlapati Tripathi wrote in an article in *Ananda Varta*¹⁷ that he had visited Ma shortly before the Atirudra Mahayajna commenced. Ma had invited him to attend it and, indicating Brni. Purnananda, had said, "Shanta is the root (moola) of the Yajna."

Now Ma called Sw. Paramananda and said to him, "The girls are saying that they want to get a yajna done." Ma went on, "Raja's yajna was rajasi; you all will do a satvik yajna." (Ma used to call Smt. Rajaben Khaitan, 'Raja'.) A few days before the ceremonies in Dehra Dun ended, Ma asked Shri S. K. Dutta (a devotee) to observe the proceedings very carefully. She told him not to get involved in any other work in the near future, so that he would be free when needed.

¹⁷ *Ananda Varta*, now renamed *Amrit Varta*, is a quarterly magazine published by the Anandamayee Sangha.





II. Yajna: Importance and Constituents

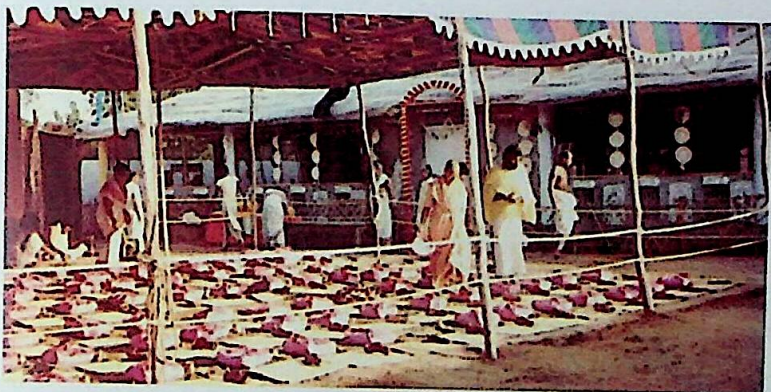
The word 'yajna' comes from the Sanskrit root 'yaj'. A Sanskrit root can have more than one meaning. Scholars have assigned the following meanings to 'yaj' - the worship of devatas¹⁸, a coming together, or union¹⁹, and the giving of gifts. A yajna, therefore, is an activity wherein devatas²⁰ are worshipped; a union occurs of the sacrifice with the devata; and appropriate gifts are given.

¹⁸ Nirukta 7.4: *devo dānād vā dipanād vā dyotanād vā dyusthāno bhavatīti vā* | (A devata gives, or illumines, or is luminous or resides in Dyuh Loka.)

¹⁹ Panini's Dhatupaatha: *yaja devapūjāsamgatikarāṇadāneṣu*

²⁰ Katyayana Shrautsutra: *dravyam devatā tyāgaḥ* | (Materials or havi, devata or Indra etc., and sacrifice or offering. To put it in another way: *devatoddeśena dravyatyāgo yāgaḥ* i.e. a yajna is the sacrifice of materials for a devata.)

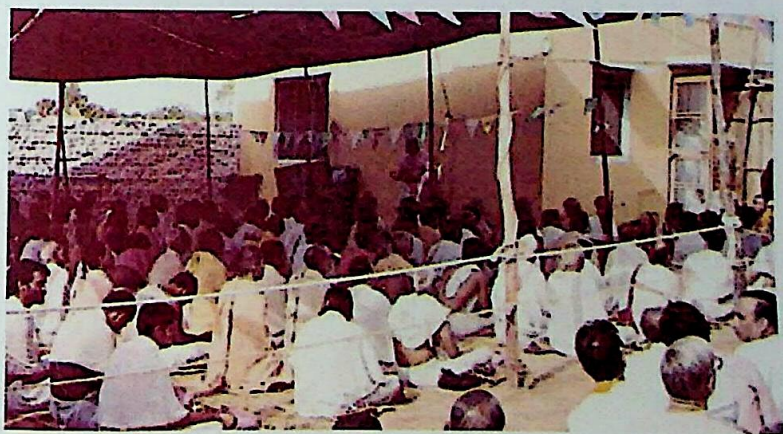




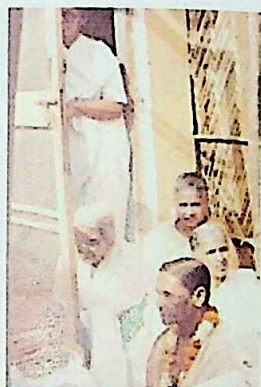
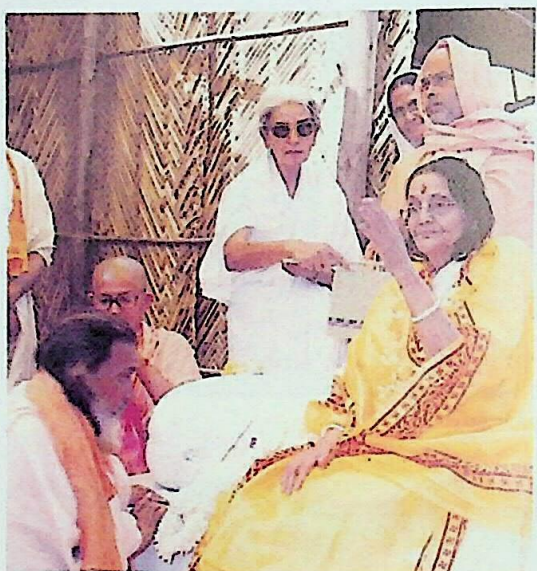
Varan laid out for the pandits



Close-up of the varan

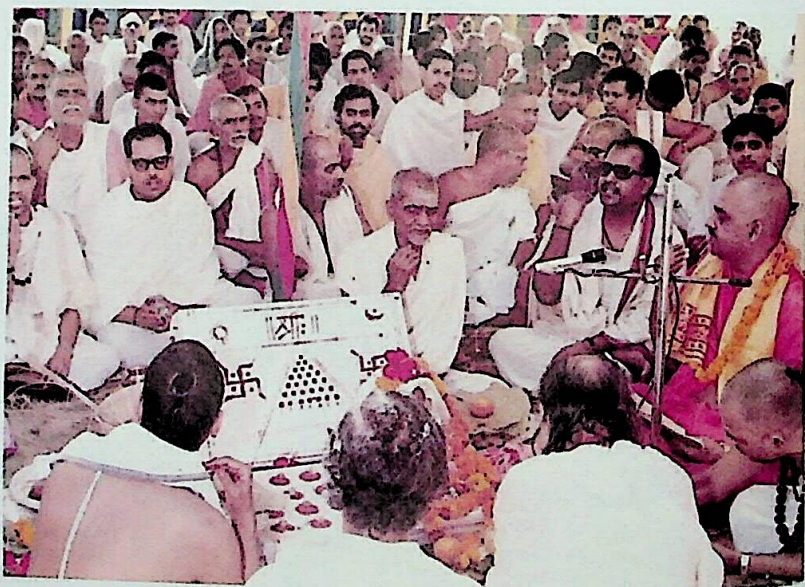


Pandits at the Varan ritual, seated within the enclosure



*Km. Nirmal Handu
(sitting behind
gentleman with garland)
and other devotees
witnessing the Varan*

*Br. Bhaskarananda offering Ma the varan of the
sarvopadrashta; Dr. Padma Misra with a fan, Brni.
Purnananda sitting on to her left, and other members
of the Ashram*



Pt. Vamadeva, behind the microphone, conducting the Panchanga Pujan

Vedic worship: A yajna is the Vedic way of worshipping a devata.²¹ Devatas may not be almighty, but they are extremely powerful, much more powerful than mortals are. Devatas are pleased when we make oblations of certain materials, accompanied by a chanting of Vedic mantras, into the fire of a yajna. The power within the mantras serves to make the yajna potent and fruitful. Devatas are pleased by such worship and grant to us the objects of our desire. The essential purpose of a yajna, therefore, is to facilitate an exchange between devatas and humans, an exchange which also constitutes their mutual support.²²

The scriptures say that we incur certain debts when we take birth, including a debt to the devatas. Our debts to the devatas are repaid by conducting yajnas.²³

The Vedas state that the Lord created the universe through the agency of yajna; the Vedas themselves were made manifest by this yajna.²⁴ Elsewhere in the scriptures, it is stated that when Prajapati²⁵ created humans, he also

²¹ Shatapatha Brahmana 1.7.1.5: *yajño vai śreṣṭhatamam karma* | (Yajna, i.e. its performance, is indeed the highest karma.)

²² Bhagavadgita 3.11: *devānbhāvayatānena te devā bhāvayantu vaḥ | parasparam bhāvayantaḥ śreyaḥ paramavāpsyatha* | | (With this do you nourish the devatas, and may the gods nourish you; thus nourishing one another, you shall attain to the highest good.)

²³ Shatapatha Brahmana 1.7.2.1-5: *ṛnam ha vai jāyate yo'sti | sa jāyamāna eva devebhya ṛsibhyaḥ pitṛbhyo manuṣyebhyaḥ | sa yadeva yajate | tena devebhya ṛnam jāyate* | (When a man is born, whoever he may be, there is born simultaneously a debt to the gods, to the sages, to the ancestors, and to men. When he performs sacrifice, i.e. yajna, it is the debt to the gods which he is repaying.)

²⁴ The Purusha Sukta, Rigveda 10.90.1-16, describes this primeval yajna.

²⁵ Prajapati, the Creator, is also known as Brahma. Gopatha Brahmana 5.8: *prajāpatirvai Brahma* | (Prajapati is indeed Brahma.) Shatapatha Brahmana 13.6.2.8: *brahma vai prajāpatiḥ* | (Brahma is indeed Prajapati.)



created the means for them to secure their sustenance and to fulfill their desires. This means was the process of yajna. By performing yajnas, one's needs and desires, both in this world as well as in the next, may be fulfilled.²⁶ Moreover, the entire world and all the processes occurring in it, on every plane, seen and unseen, may be likened to many diverse yajnas taking place.²⁷ Our scriptures enjoin that people perform yajnas for personal and universal welfare.²⁸ It is incumbent upon each of us, therefore, to at least aid in the process of a yajna.

²⁶ Bhagavadgita 3.10: *sahayajñāḥ prajāḥ sṛṣṭvā purovāca prajāpatiḥ | anena prasaviṣyadhvameṣa vo'sviṣṭakāmādhuk |* | (Having at the beginning of creation created mankind together with yajna, Prajapati said: "By this, i.e. by yajna, shall you prosper; and this, i.e. yajna, shall be your Kamadhenu, i.e. the milch cow of your desires.") 3.12: *iṣṭānbhogānhi vo devā dāsyante yañṣabhavitāḥ | tairdattānapradāyaibhyo yo bhuñkte stena eva saḥ |* | (The gods, nourished by yajnas, will give you the objects of your desire; but he who enjoys these objects given by the gods without offering to them anything in return, is, indeed, a thief.)

²⁷ Kalika Purana 31.40: *yajñādevāḥ prajāścaiva yajñādannaniyoginaḥ | sarvayajñātsadā bhāvi sarvaṁ yajñamayam jagat |* | (From yajna arose devas, living things, food and those dependent upon food; everything will arise from yajna in the future, too; the world is of and from yajna.)

²⁸ Bhagavadgita 3.14: *annādbhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍannasambhavaḥ | yajñādbhavati parjanyo yajñāḥ karmasamudbhavaḥ |* | (From food come forth beings; from rain, food is produced; from yajna arises rain, and yajna is born of action.) 3.15: *karma brahmodbhavam viddhi brahmākṣarasamudbhavam | tasmātsarvagatam brahma nityam yajñe pratiṣṭhitam |* | (Know that action arises from Brahma, and Brahma from the Imperishable. Therefore, the all-pervading (Brahma) is ever established in sacrifice.) 3.16: *evam pravartitam cakram nānuvartayati ha yaḥ | aghāyurindriyārāmo moghaṁ pārtha sa jīvati |* | (He who does not follow the wheel thus set revolving, i.e. one who does not perform his role in it, is sinful, rejoices in the senses, and lives in vain, O Arjuna!)



All rituals including yajnas, which form a part of karmakanda, require the most rigorous adherence to the rules of the scriptures. Any shortcoming can lead, at best, to not obtaining the desired result and, at worst, to obtaining contrary results. A yajna, therefore, should be conducted with great diligence. Utmost care should be taken to ensure that purity is preserved in every sphere of its performance. The scriptures warn that those who do not follow prescribed rules or try to obstruct the process of a yajna, suffer.

Actions and motives: According to the motives with which they are performed, actions are divided into two groups. Sakam actions are those that are impelled by personal desire, whilst nishkam actions are those that are not motivated by such ambitions. Since yajnas are actions, they also are of two kinds, based on the motive that directs them. Those carried out with a personal goal in mind (e.g. progeny, heaven etc.) are sakam yajnas. Nishkam yajnas, too, have an aim. However, the aim is not of individual gain but of universal benefit. A nishkam yajna performed for the benefit of the whole world benefits all of Creation. Additionally, yajnas for obtaining moksha or Vishnu are also nishkam in nature. This is because they do not aim at personal or worldly gain. The highest kind of nishkam yajnas, however, are those that are performed solely for carrying out the injunctions of the scriptures or those that are performed for no reason other than divine inspiration.²⁹ By performing nishkam yajnas, one does not create further

²⁹ Akhanda Mahayajna by Gurupriya Devi, published by Shri Shri Anandamayee Charitable Society, pgs 4-5.



karma for oneself; rather, one loosens the bondage of previous karmas.³⁰

Further, a yajna is termed satvik if it is devoid of personal motives and faithfully follows scriptural injunctions; it is rajasik if personal gain is the motive, and tamasik, if it is performed with no regard for scriptural injunctions.³¹

Yajna and rain: It is well-known that yajnas effect rainfall.³² The subtle connection between yajnas and rain, including evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and the roles played by the wind and the Sun, are explained in ancient texts.³³ Food and other materials are burnt when

³⁰ Bhagavadgita 3.9: *yajñārthātkarmaṇo'nyatra loko'yaṁ karmabandhanaḥ | tadārthaṁ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samācara |* | (The world is bound by actions other than those performed for the sake of yajna; therefore, O son of Kunti! perform, unattached, action only for yajna.)

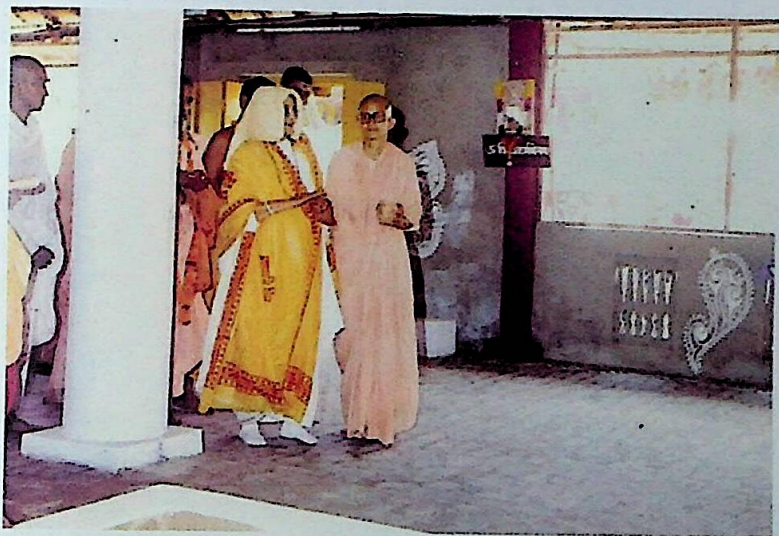
³¹ Bhagavadgita 17.11: *aphalākāṅkṣibhīryajño vidhidṛṣṭo ya ijjate | yaṣṭavyameveti manaḥ samādhāyā sa sāttvikaḥ |* | (That yajna is satvik, which is performed in accordance with scriptural injunctions, by persons who do not wish for its fruit, and who have the firm belief that yajnas must be performed. 17.12: *abhisamdhāya tu phalaṁ dambhārthamapi caiva yat | ijjate bharataśreṣṭha taṁ yajñaṁ viddhi rājasam |* | (Know that yajna to be rajasik, O Bharata! which is performed with an eye on its fruit and for the purpose of ostentation.) 17.13: *vidhihinamasṛṣṭānnaṁ mantrahinamadakṣiṇam | śraddhāvirahitaṁ yajñaṁ tāmasaṁ paricakṣate |* | (That yajna is said to be tamasik which is against the ordinances of the scriptures, in which no food is distributed, which is devoid of mantras and dakshina, and which is performed without faith.)

³² Bhagavadgita 3.14 (See footnote 28.)

³³ Taittiriya Samhita 2-4-16: *agnirvā ito vṛṣṭim smārayati dhāmacchād divi khalu vai bhūtvā varṣati marutaḥ sṛṣṭāṁ vṛṣṭim nayati |* (Agni, with the help of Vayu, converts the havi from here into clouds. These clouds are led by Vayu and cause rain.)

Manu Smṛiti 3-76: *agnau prastāhutiḥ samyagādityamupatiṣṭate | ādityājīyāte vṛṣṭirvṛṣṭerannaṁ tataḥ prajāḥ |* (Ahuti, offered in the proper manner into Agni, goes to Surya; Surya gives rise to rain, rain produces anna, i.e. food, which in turn sustains people.)

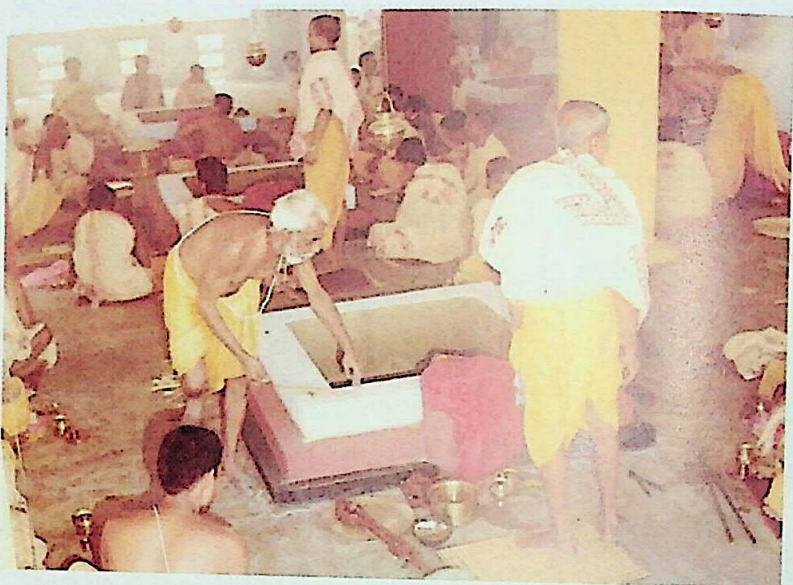




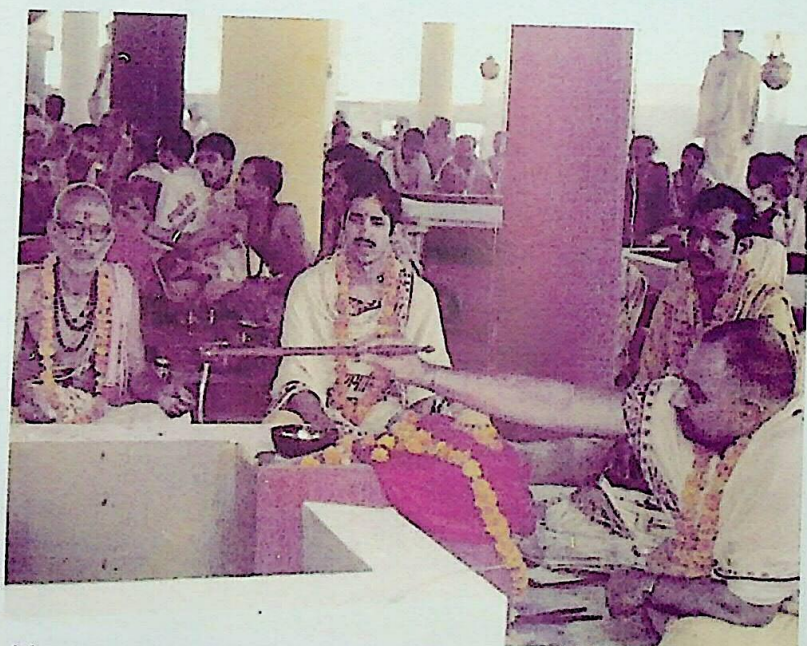
Ma entering the mandap holding Brni. Purnananda's hand



Agni Mantan



Agni Sthapana



A kundacharya giving an ahuti of ghee

offered into the fire of a yajna and, turning into extremely subtle substances, enter the atmosphere. These processes result in rainfall. Pure things offered into the fire of a yajna in the prescribed manner, result in rainfall that produces good crops that sustain humankind. If Aditya (Sun) receives one part of anything, he returns it in multiple measure. This is Aditya's nature and his blessing upon us. Thus, when anything offered into the fire of a yajna reaches Aditya after vapourisation, we can be assured of an abundant return. If the rain produced afterwards is harmful, we should understand that what was offered to the devata was polluted, or that the yajna was not performed properly. Such rain causes harm to humankind as well as to all living creatures. For example, harmful rain causes diseased crops to grow, or such crops that cause diseases when consumed.

Constituents of a yajna: A yajna has five main constituents - (1) Devata: the main deity worshipped in the yajna, (2) Havi: the materials offered into the fire, (3) Vedic mantras, (4) Ritviks and (5) Dakshina. These are elaborated upon below.

Shatapatha Brahmana 5-3: *agnirvai dhūmro jāyate dhūmrādabhrābhrād vṛṣṭiḥ* | (Fire gives rise to vapour; vapour to clouds; and clouds to rain.)

Shatapatha Brahmana 3-6-2-22: *itaḥ pradānā vai vṛṣṭirito hyagnirvṛṣṭim vanute sa (agni) etaiḥ stokairetān stokān vanute ta'ete stokā varṣanti* | (Agni changes the havi offered in yajnas into rain. This fire of the yajna produces rain - only as much rain, as is the havi that was offered.)



1. Devatas are various manifestations of the One Divine Energy.³⁴ They are the subtle, hidden energies that are involved in the functioning of the universe. However, a dormant energy cannot accomplish anything; it has to be appropriately and fully awakened before it can carry out its task. This awakening can be done through the agency of a yajna. The awakening is effected by the havi, which is offered, accompanied by the chanting of the relevant mantras, during a yajna. This process is not a forceful harnessing, but a respectful directing of an energy towards a particular purpose.³⁵ This is the main purpose of a yajna and is what is meant by making offerings to a devata. Each yajna has one main devata as its focus and for whom the oblations, accompanied by mantras, are offered.

2. The material offered as oblation into the fire of a yajna, and which provides nourishment for the devatas, is called havi.³⁶ The word 'havi' comes from the Sanskrit root 'hu', one meaning of which is 'offer or sacrifice'. The word 'ahuti' also comes from this same root. An ahuti is a single oblation

³⁴ Purusha Sukta and Rigveda 1.164.46: *indram mitram varuṇamagnimāhuratho divyaḥ sa suparṇo garutmān | ekaṁ sad viprā bahudhā vadantyaṅniṁ yamaṁ mātariśvānamāhuḥ |* (They call him Indra, Mitra, Varuna, Agni, and he is heavenly nobly-winged Garutmān; to what is One, sages give many names: they call it Agni, Yama, Matarishvan.) Rigveda 8.58.2: *eka evāgnirbahudhā samiddha ekaḥ sūryo viśvamanu prabhūtaḥ | ekaivoṣāḥ sarvamidam vibhītyekaṁ vā idam vibabhūva sarvam |* (The one Agni burns in many ways; the one Sun enters all and manifests in several ways; the one Dawn illumines the entire world; the one lord appears in the form of all Creation.)

³⁵ Akhanda Mahayajna, by Gurupriya Devi, published by Shri Shri Anandamayee Charitable Society, pgs 2-3.

³⁶ Shatapatha Brahmana 1-6-3-39: *haviṁṣi ha vā'ātmā yajñasya |* (Havi is the atma of yajna.)



i.e. a single act of offering havi. Each ahuti of havi is accompanied by the appropriate mantra, beginning with "Om" and ending (for shanti yajnas, as this Yajna was) with "Svaha". By offering ahuti, the yajman formally invites a devata.³⁷ Ahuti is also a means of pleasing the devata and thus, obtaining the desired result through the devata's blessing, which is the aim of any yajna.

3. Mantras are the sacred words that accompany each ahuti and aid in the transmission of the havi to the devatas.

4. Ritviks are brahmin pandits, learned in Vedic mantras, who are invited to perform a yajna.

5. Gifts and money given to ritviks for carrying out the rituals of a yajna comprise dakshina.³⁸ Dakshina is given in an appropriate quantity and in the prescribed manner.

Agni: A yajna may have any devata as its main devata, but Agni devata is central to the very process of yajna. Oblations, accompanied by appropriate mantras, and with the chosen devata as the focus, are offered to Agni. Agni transports these offerings to the devata. It is for this role that the Vedas have named Agni 'hota' (or the priest of the sacrifice who gives to the devatas their offering), 'devaduta'

³⁷ Shatapatha Brahmana 11-2-2-6: *tadyadāhvayati tasmādhutimāma* | (That which invites, that is called ahuti.)

³⁸ Shatapatha Brahmana 2-2-2-2: *taṁ (yajñam) devā dakṣiṇābhiradakṣayamistadyadenam* | (*yajñam*) *dakṣiṇābhiradakṣayamistadyasmād dakṣiṇā nāma* | (The devatas have made yajnas strong and secure, i.e. daksh, by dakshina; because of this, it is called dakshina.)

Shatapatha Brahmana 4-3-4-7: *catastro vai dakṣiṇāḥ* | *hiranyam gaurvāso'svāḥ* | (These four are dakshina, i.e. worthy of being given as dakshina: gold, cows, clothes and horses.)



(or medium of the devatas) and 'devamukha' (or mouth of the devatas)³⁹.

The kindling of fire in the arani is called Agni Manthan (or Arani Manthan). With the help of a specially prepared rope, the rod of the arani is rotated in its cradle to create friction. Friction produces the sparks that are used to light the fire in the kundas. The arani is made from specific wood and to specific dimensions. The fire thus kindled for a yajna, accompanied by Vedic mantras, is called Braahmagni. This Braahmagni is given specific names when it is established in the kundas of different types of yajnas. These names are based on the role of Agni in the ceremonies. The fire of the Atirudra Mahayajna, until the Uttaranga Pujan (the concluding pujan), was called Varad. That of the Uttaranga Pujan, in which Agni himself was worshipped during purnahuti, was called Mrid.

Yajna paatra: The vessels used in a yajna are called 'yajna paatra'. They are of a particular design and specific measurements, and are made from specific types of wood or metal. For example, the pranita, shruva, prokshani, sphya, and shruchi are made from wood. The pranita is a small rectangular receptacle that holds water for the sanctification of articles used during the rituals. The shruva

³⁹ Rigveda 1.1: *agnimīḷe purohitam yajñasya devamṛtvijam | hotāraṁ ratnadhātāmam |* (I extol Agni: priest, God, minister of sacrifice, hota, giver of wealth.) Rigveda 1.12: *agnim dūtām vṛṇīmahe hotāraṁ viśvavedasam | asya yajñasya sukratum |* (We choose Agni the messenger, the herald, master of all wealth, well-skilled in this, our sacrifice.) Mahabharata, Adi, Pauloma, 7.10: *devatāḥ pitaraścaiva bhuñjate mayi yadghṛtam | devatānām piṭṛñāṇa mukhametadahaṁ smṛtam |* (Agni says that the pitris and the devatas are fed through my mouth; they are fed with the ghee that is poured into me, as I am their mouth.)



is a kind of ladle with which ahutis of ghee are offered into the fire. The few drops of ghee that are left in the shruva after each ahuti are collected in a small container called the prokshani, which is another yajna paatra. The blunt, knife-shaped sphya is used in the Panchabhu Sanskara. Special ahutis, like purnahuti, are offered with the shruchi. The wooden arani and metal vessels like the ajyasthali (which holds the ghee for oblations) and the charusthali (in which charu is cooked) are also counted amongst the yajna paatra. The processes during which these vessels are used are described later in this book.

Cows: Products derived from cows form an intrinsic part of the process of a yajna. Cow's milk and milk products like curd and ghee, as well as cow's urine and dung are considered beneficial. For instance, the panchamrita and panchagavya used during the ceremonies are made from various combinations of these products. Cow dung is used to clean and purify the mandap. Cow dung cakes are used to strengthen the sparks of fire after they are kindled. It is only cow's ghee that is acceptable to devatas, and so it is used as a major part of the oblations. Cows are also given as gifts to the acharya at the end of a yajna.

Conduct and duties of the ritviks: Ritviks are chosen for their moral character, knowledge of the scriptures and adherence to the traditional way of life. They should be free of any kind of mental or physical disease or deformity. For the duration of a yajna, ritviks observe certain rules both inside and outside the mandap. These rules are for maintaining the highest degree of purity of mind and body, thereby preserving the sanctity of the ceremonies. The purer



the materials, activities and atmosphere in the mandap, the greater are the chances of the success of a yajna.

For instance, ritviks enter the mandap only after their daily ablutions and sandhyavandana, wearing clean, unstitched clothes. They obey the acharya and tend to the fire at all times. They live within the premises of the yajna (i.e. in a suitable place near the mandap) and go to their residence only after purnahuti. They do not cut their hair or nails for the duration of the yajna. They abstain from stimulants, anger, and unnecessary talk and maintain truth, celibacy and a spirit of contentment.

Ritviks assume various duties within the mandap and so they are given titles accordingly. Each kunda has an acharya who is known as the kundacharya. The pradhanacharya is the acharya for the entire function. The pradhanacharya (henceforth called 'acharya') ensures that the yajna is carried out according to the injunctions laid down by the scriptures and that other ritviks carry out their duties properly. He himself has the capability of carrying out many of the tasks of a yajna, should such a situation arise. The acharya must be devoid of any physical, mental, or moral weakness. He must have a deep understanding of the scriptures, be able to chant mantras properly and command the admiration of the learned. He must lead a pure and balanced life. As has been mentioned earlier, Pt. Vamadeva Mishra was the acharya for this Atirudra Mahayajna.

The ritvik who bears the title of brahma sees that all the rituals are being carried out properly by every ritvik as well as by the acharya, and that nothing is being omitted.



A human brahma cannot be vigilant at all times. Therefore, a bunch of kusha grass⁴⁰ representing brahma is consecrated in a kamandala, and placed on the southern side of the kunda. This is because most obstacles in the form of troublesome entities like the rakshasa, danava, sarpa and pishacha come from this direction. For this very reason, the brahma of each kunda sits on its southern side.

The task of the hota is to invite the devatas to a yajna and to perform havan in the kunda. The gaanapatya does japa of Ganapati in order to prevent and remove obstacles. The sadasya acts as a messenger between the acharya and other ritviks, carries out odd jobs, and even substitutes for a ritvik if the need arises. The sarvopadrashta oversees the actions of the ritviks and all other activities inside the mandap. Ma was the sarvopadrashta in the Atirudra Mahayajna, and thus there was only a rare chance that an error would occur. It was inconceivable that the chance error would not be corrected.

Each door of a mandap has two dvarapalas, or ritviks, acting as guardians of the door. Dvarapalas know their particular Veda and recite it properly throughout the proceedings. The ritvik who is the jaapaka does japa of a particular deity, keeping in mind the meaning of the japa, sitting still and not engaging in any conversation. In the Atirudra Mahayajna, the jaapaka did japa of the Shiva panchakshari mantra. The role of ritvik who is the paricharaka is to carry out various odd jobs.

⁴⁰ Kusha is a type of grass that is considered sacred and is used in many rituals. It is said that Brahma, Shankar and Vishnu reside in each stalk of this grass.



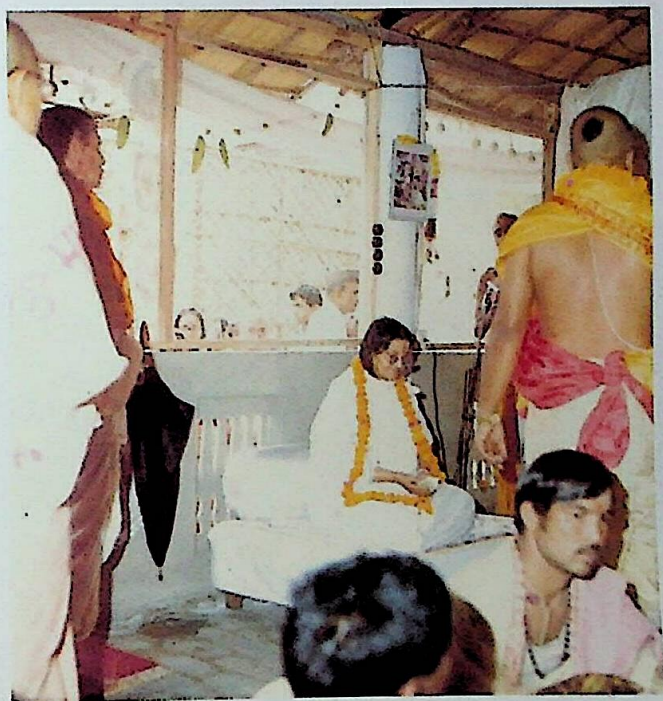
In the Atirudra Mahayajna, each kunda had eleven ritviks: nine hotas, one kundacharya, and one brahma. The hotas at each kunda offered shakalya into the fire, while the kundacharya offered ghee. The ritviks chanted the mantras of the Rudra Ashtadhyayi, starting with "Om" and ending with "Svaha". Thus, since there were eleven kundas, there were totally a hundred and twenty-one ritviks at the kundas. Apart from these, there were also one brahma (for the entire Yajna), one pradhanacharya, one gaanapatya, one sadasya, one jaapaka, one Shiva Purana paathaka, and eight dvarapalas. The sarvopadrashtha is not counted, so the total number of ritviks in the mandap was a hundred and thirty-five.

Yajman: The yajman is the person who hosts and organises a yajna, takes the sankalpa and bears all the expenditure. Rules for personal cleanliness and purity apply to him, too. The yajman has to see that all the materials required for the pujas are available at the proper time, the sanctity of the mandap is maintained, the ritviks are well looked after and are given the appropriate dakshina at the end of the function.

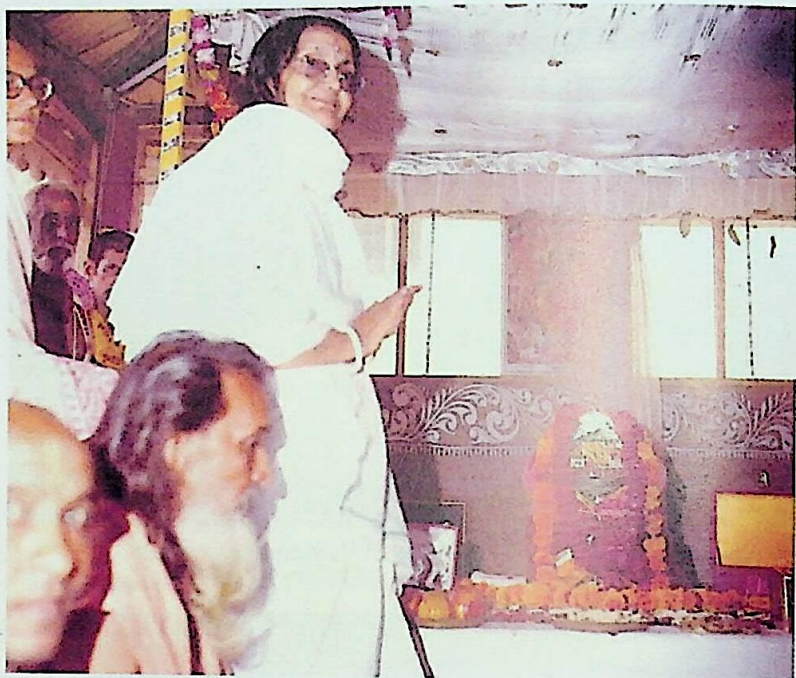




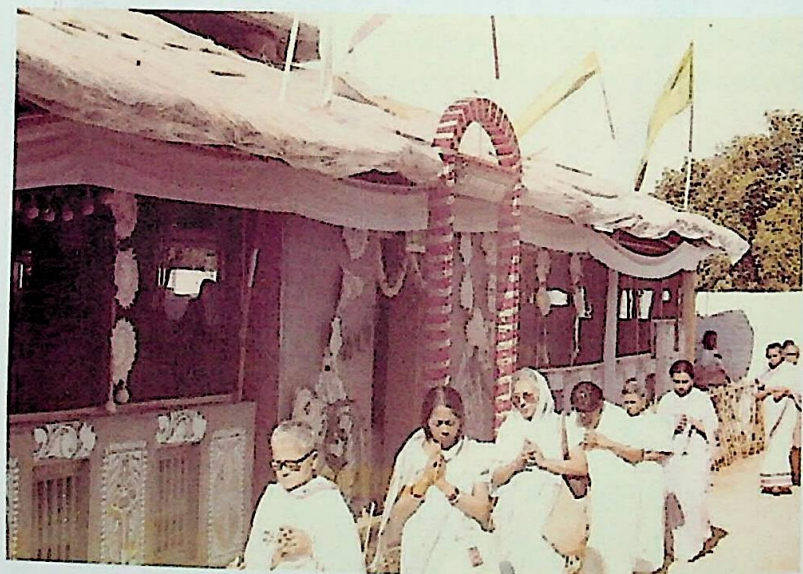
Ritviks within the yajnashala, seated for the Brahmin Pujan ritual



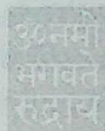
Ma on Her cot, along the northern wall of the yajnashala



Ma and Br. Bhaskarananda near the Pradhan vedi



Members of the Ashram and other devotees performing parikrama



III. Rudra

Part 1: The following text is translated from an article written by the late Dr. Vamadeva Mishra, PhD, Vedacharya, which appeared in a booklet printed at the time of the Atirudra Mahayajna. Dr. Vamadeva Mishra was the pradhanacharya of this Yajna.

Rudra and Shiva: This entire Creation, with its moving and unmoving constituents, is dependent on yajna. There are two types of yajna. The first type is that which is being performed constantly by Prakriti, through which this world was created and is being sustained (*Taittiriya Aranyaka* 2-10). The second type is that which is enjoined upon us by the shrutis and smritis, in which we offer special things to the devatas, in a prescribed manner. This is very vital for worldly wellbeing.

In both these types, Agni and Soma perform their attendant roles as receiver and bestower. Agni signifies



om namo bhagavate rudrāya

'ananda' or bliss and Soma 'anna' or food. Both these elements inherently pervade, and thereby signify, all Creation. Despite having contrary properties, Agni and Soma are but two facets of the Supreme Being (*Taittiriya Samhita* 1-8-6-1): the fierce form, Rudra, is signified by Agni and the gentle form, Shiva, by Soma (*Vajasaneyi Samhita* 16-2 and 49). Thus described, Rudra, though manifest as twin facets of the Supreme Being is, in essence, one.

Rudra on different levels: The essentially one Rudra can be classified according to his various manifestations on the adhibhautik, adhidaivik, adhyatmik, and adhiyajnik levels.

Adhibhautik Rudra is understood as manifested in eight forms. These are as follows: The eight murtis (forms) of Shiva are 1. Prithvi, 2. Jala, 3. Teja, 4. Vayu, 5. Akasha, 6. Surya, 7. Chandrama and 8. Vidyut (*Shabdāmala; Tantrasara*). The remaining three, out of a total of eleven forms, are the Rudra murtis. They are 9. Paavak, 10. Pavmaan and 11. Shuchi (*Kurma Purana adhyaya* 12).

Adhidaivik Rudra also manifests in eleven forms. These are 1. Aja (ek paat), 2. Ahirbudhnya, 3. Virupaksh, 4. Tvashta (Ayonija, Bharga), 5. Raivat (Bhairav, Karpadi or Veerabhadra), 6. Har (Nakulish or Sthanu), 7. Bahurupa (Senani or Girish), 8. Tryambak, 9. Kapali, 10. Vrishakapi (Shambhu or Jayant) and 11. Pinaki (Mrigvyadh or Sharva) (*Garuda Purana adhyaya* 6, *Matsya Purana adhyaya* 5). The alternative names are on account of different forms of the same deity.

The eleven forms of the Adhyatmik Rudra are: 1. Prana, 2. Apan, 3. Saman, 4. Udan, 5. Vyan, 6. Naag, 7. Kurma, 8. Krikal, 9. Devadutt, 10. Dhananjaya and 11. Atma (*Skanda Purana, Shatapatha Brahmana* 14-5-9).



The Adhiyajnik Rudras are related to the ritual requirements of yajnas and are as follows: the three main fires viz. 1. Garhapatya, 2. Ahvaniya and 3. Dakshinagni ("*tvamagne rudra*", *Rigveda Samhita* 2-1-6 and *Atharvaveda Samhita* 1-87-1) as well as those established as the eight forms of Rudra. These eight forms are: 1. Agnidhriya, 2. Hotriya, 3. Brahmanachhasiya, 4. Potriya, 5. Neshtriya, 6. Achchha Vaakiya, 7. Marjaliya and 8. Prashastriya. These eleven fires (*Ka. Shr. Su.* 8-6-10-20 and *Manav Kalpasutra, Soma Prakarana*) are considered forms of Rudra. (*Ka. Shr. Su.* 8-6-15)

However, despite these different manifestations, Rudra is essentially one (*Taittiriya Samhita* 1-8-6-1, *Shwetashvatara* 3-2). Because of his greatness, pervasiveness and expansive form, the Rudra of the shruti, as mentioned above, is considered as taking on various forms (*Taittiriya Samhita* 4-5-11-5). We resort to various forms of worship in order to obtain the blessings of Paramatma whose two facets are Rudra and Shiva.

Forms of worship: The worship of Rudra takes two fundamental forms—one according to the vama tantra and the other according to the dakshina tantra. Vama tantra is aghora tantra. Dakshina tantra is enjoined by the shruti and smriti. Dakshina tantra is further divided into the japatmak, paathatmak, abhishekatmak and havanatmak⁴¹

⁴¹ In these different yajnas, the main devata is worshipped in different ways: by japa in a japatmak yajna, by paatha in a paathatmak yajna, by abhisheka in an abhishekatmak yajna and by ahutis in a havanatmak yajna. The number of times the japa, paatha, abhisheka and ahutis are performed determines the scale of the yajna. This yajna, the Atirudra Mahayajna, was a havanatmak yajna.

om namo bhagavate rudrāya

forms of worship. Japatmak worship is performed with tantrik mantras; the other three employ Vedic mantras. Each of these three take five forms-1. Rupak, 2. Ekadashini, 3. Laghurudra, 4. Maharudra and 5. Atirudra.

Rupakrudra: This Rudra yajna entails worship with svasti and other general mantras, one chanting of a collection of 200 mantras, and Abhisheka or havan with 202 ahutis. Ekadashini: This Rudra yajna entails 11 chantings of the paatha, with the fifth anuvak being chanted in a special way, along with a few other modifications and havan with 1818 ahutis. Laghurudra: This Rudra yajna comprises of 11 rounds of the chantings of an Ekadashini done at one anushthan, and havan with 19,998 ahutis. Maharudra: This Rudra yajna comprises of 11 rounds of the chantings of a Laghurudra at one anushthan (or 121 ekadashini) and havan with 219,978 ahutis. Atirudra: This Rudra yajna collectively comprises of 11 rounds of the chantings of a Maharudra at one anushthan (or 1331 ekadashini), and havan with 2,419,758 ahutis. This last, according to tradition, is the highest and largest kind of Rudra yajna.

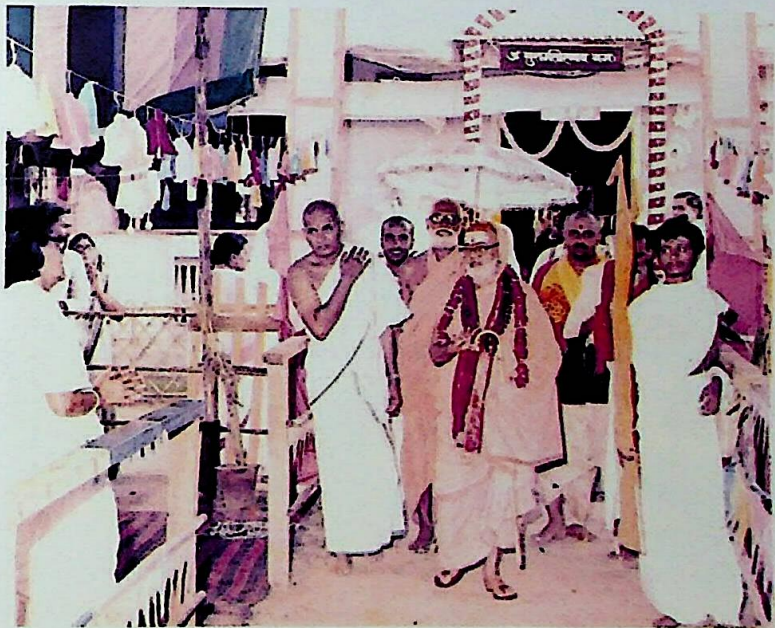
Part 2: The following excerpt is loosely translated from an article entitled "Rudratattva tatha Rudrayajna" by Km. Gauri Banerjee, which appeared in the Ananda Varta.

There is only One Consciousness, variously named Bhagavan, Brahm, Paramatma and so on, that energises the Universe. That One Eternal Essence manifests as diverse forms and effects. While creating, this essence is called Brahma, while sustaining, Vishnu, and while destroying, Rudra.

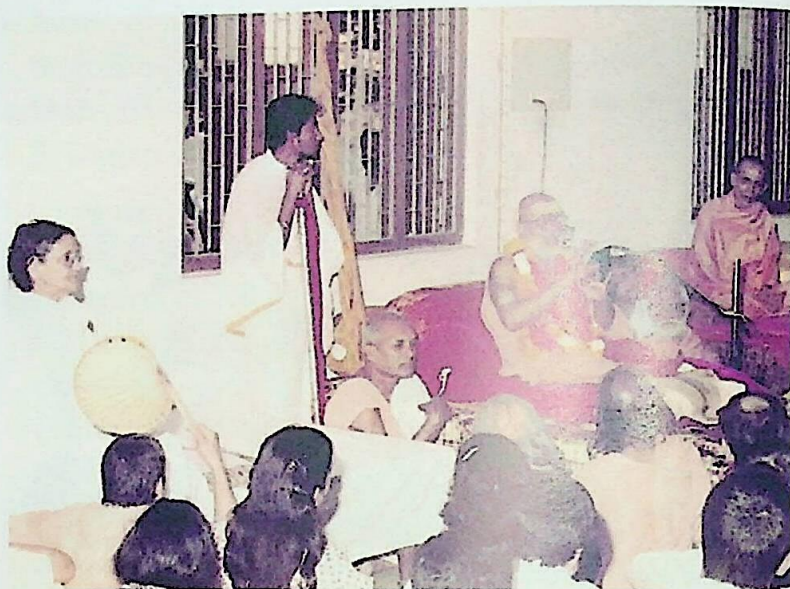




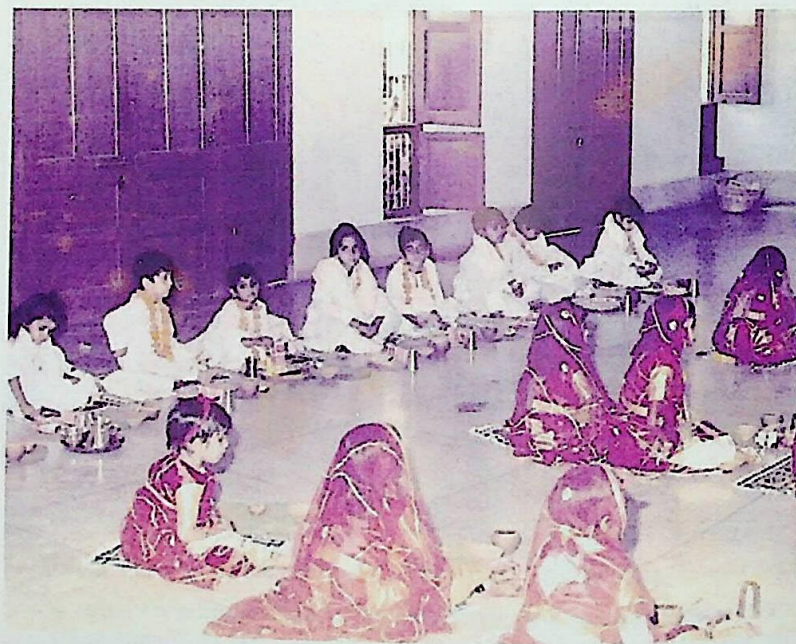
A crowd of devotees performing parikrama



The Shankaracharya of Dwarika Sharadapeetha coming out of the yajnasala; Sw. Satchidananda (a dandi sanyasi of the Ashram) and Pt. Vamadeva are seen behind him



The Shankaracharya of Dwarika Sharadapeetha giving a talk in the Hall of the Ashram; Ma and Sw. Chidananda, of the Divine Life Society, are also present



Some of the kumaris and batuks who were worshipped during the Kumari Puja

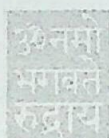
The Vedas, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and other texts mention Rudra or Shiva at various places. Three suktas in the Rigveda - First Mandala: Sukta 114, Second Mandala: Sukta 33 and Seventh Mandala: Sukta 46 - praise Rudra. Besides these references, Rudra is mentioned, along with other devatas, seventy-five times in this Veda. In the Yajurveda, the entire Chapter 16 is devoted to Rudra's praises. The Atharvaveda devotes Sukta 2, in Kanda 11, to Rudra. Thus, Rudra holds a special place in Vedic literature. The Yajurveda says that the one who destroys sorrows is Rudra; he is the one who gives knowledge; and he is the one who causes sinners to suffer and to cry.

There are times when sinners rule the Earth. In order to protect dharma, saints, and mahatmas, the Lord, as Rudra, causes the destruction of these sinners. In other words, the Lord's destructive form is also beneficial. The one who destroys in the form of Rudra is also the one who is the source of beneficence for everyone. The one who is Rudra is also Shiva. They are not two separate realities. The anguish, sorrow or fear we experience is the form of Rudra; the peace and happiness we experience is the form of Shiva.

Agni and Soma are at the heart of Creation. In the process of a yajna, we can see both Agni and Soma. Fire in the kunda, which accepts oblations, is Agni and oblations of rice, ghee etc. are Soma.

Through performing a Rudrayajna, one can be free from all sins as well as sorrow, fear and the like. Rudra is the god of destruction or death. Through his worship, the fear of death, trouble or disease is destroyed.





IV. Choosing the Dates

Ma had asked someone to enquire from Pt. Ranganath about the best time to hold the Atirudra Mahayajna. He had replied that the month of Shravan⁴² is best for a Rudra yajna. Shravan was only a couple of months away, leaving very little time for preparations. It was also the dakshinayana⁴³ half of the year. The brahmacharinis thought that it would not be suitable and decided, instead, to wait for uttarayana. They also asked Pt. Ranganath to send them the details of the arrangements that would have to be made for the Yajna. However, even after a few

⁴² A month in the Hindu calendar, part July - part August.

⁴³ The half of the year, when, after the Sun has entered Karka rashi (Cancer) in July, it begins to move in the southward direction. Uttarayana is the other half of the year; it begins when the Sun enters Makara rashi (Capricorn) in January, and begins to move in the northward direction. This latter half of the year is considered more auspicious.

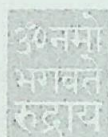


months, there was no word from Pt. Ranganath. A couple of reminders, too, did not elicit a response.

Much time had elapsed since the decision to hold the Yajna had been taken, but the brahmacharinis were still unclear about the details of the arrangements. To begin with, the acharya had not yet been chosen. This was to be the first step, since it was he who would finalise the dates for holding the Yajna, and would provide details of the arrangements to be made.

However, a short while later when Ma was in Varanasi, everything was finalised quite easily and quickly. It was suggested to Ma that Pt. Vamadeva, a resident of Varanasi, should be consulted on the details of the Yajna. By the end of Pt. Vamadeva's meeting with Ma, it was clear that he had Ma's blessings and would be the acharya for the Yajna. Pt. Vamadeva suggested that the 6th of May, which was the Shuklapaksha Tritiya of Vaisakh, as the best day to commence the Yajna. The Yajna was to continue for eleven days and conclude on the 16th of May. Once the dates were settled, the preparations began in earnest.





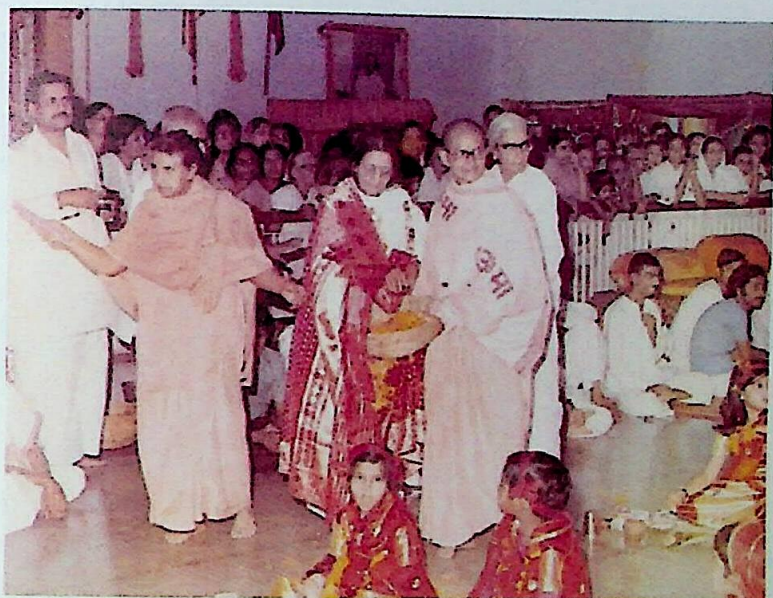
v. The Atirudra Mahayajna Committee

The brahmacharinis consulted with Shri B. K. Shah (a devotee) about funding for the Atirudra Mahayajna. Shri B. K. Shah pointed out that it would be difficult for them to collect such a large sum on an individual basis. Amongst other things, he suggested that they form a Committee so that preparations for the Yajna, which included the collection of funds, could be carried out in an organised manner. He also lent them a book which contained descriptions of such yajnas and from which they obtained much useful information.

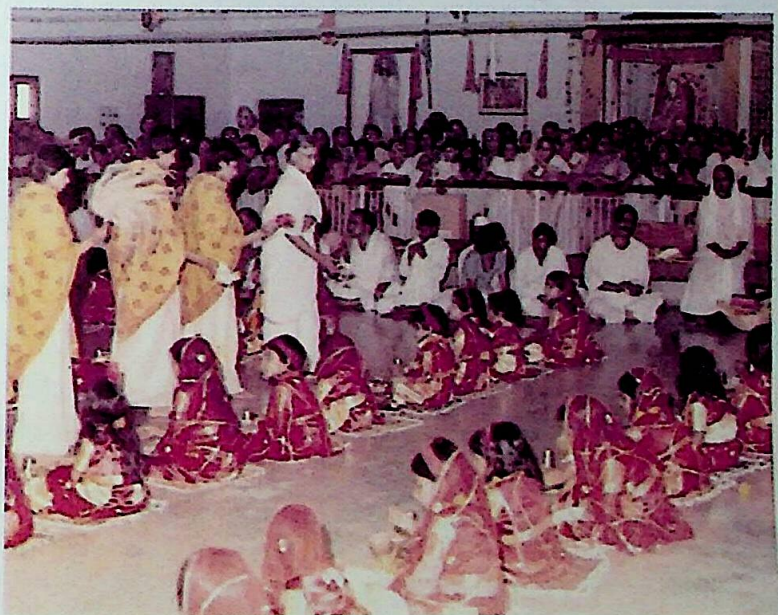
The idea of forming a Committee was placed before Ma by the brahmacharinis when She came to Vrindavan⁴⁴ a little

⁴⁴ Ma had ashrams in several cities in India and would visit them accompanied by Her devotees and ashramites.





Ma taking flowers to worship the kumaris



Brahmacharinis worshipping the kumaris



Ma in bhava when She was worshipped as Shiva

later. Sw. Paramananda and Br. Bhaskarananda were also present at the discussion. Ma said that the Committee should consist of five members and asked Brni. Purnananda for names of those who could be included in it. Brni. Purnananda suggested that Dr. Km. Padma Misra, a retired professor of Benaras Hindu University and, at the time, Vice-President of the Kanyapeeth⁴⁵, be part of the Committee. Ma agreed saying, "Keep Padma. Keep Parul. Who else should be there?" Brni. Purnananda suggested the names of Km. Nirmal Handu and Km. Aruna Pandya, and Ma agreed.

A short while later, in Kankhal, and in Ma's presence, each Committee member was assigned a post. Dr. Padma Misra was appointed President, Km. Parul, Vice-President and Km. Nirmal, Treasurer. Brni. Purnananda suggested that Km. Aruna be appointed Secretary. Ma asked her, "Why Aruna? Why not you?" Brni. Purnananda naturally agreed to be Secretary. Km. Aruna was appointed Assistant Secretary. Thus the Atirudra Mahayajna Committee, consisting of five members, all of them brahmacharinis, was formed.

Sw. Paramananda said that it would be a good thing if there were no differences amongst the Committee members. Ma said, "When Padma is there, she will look after everything." Ma also said that if selfishness did not come in the way, there would be no problem.

Later in Rishikesh, during the Samyam Saptah⁴⁶, it was decided that the newly-formed Atirudra Mahayajna

⁴⁵ The Kanyapeeth is a boarding school for girls situated in the Shri Shri Ma Anandamayee Ashram in Varanasi.

⁴⁶ A week of austerity, with a focus on only spiritual matters that is observed in the Ashram every year.



Committee would be allowed to function independently and not be under the Anandamayee Sangha⁴⁷.

While printing letterheads for the Committee, the brahmacharinis thought, "Why not call it a 'Mahayajna' instead of just a 'Yajna'?" Thus, the letterheads bore the name 'Ati Rudra Mahayagna'.

It was only later that Pt. Vamadeva told them that a yajna that is performed for one's individual benefit, the fruit of which is to be realised either in this world or in the next, is termed 'yajna'. It contains the element of personal desire. On the other hand, a yajna performed for 'vishva kalyan' or universal welfare (as this one was) is called a 'Mahayajna'.

⁴⁷ Shri Shri Anandamayee Sangha is the body which manages the various ashrams and other establishments within India and Bangladesh, which were frequented by Ma and established in Her name.





VI. Ma's Guidance

Preparations progressed smoothly under Ma's ever-present guidance. From the initial idea to the unfolding of events in their natural order, Her abundant grace was felt by everyone. The choice of a suitable acharya, the timely decision on the dates, the perfect location of the yajnashala, its construction, the availability of funds, the procurement and transport of materials - in every big and small idea and event, Ma's interest, support and blessings were present. Moreover, everyone felt as if it was She who was the actual doer, and others were merely executing Her plans. People would be in the right place at the right time and think, say, and do whatever was required for the smooth and successful completion of this grand event.

Ma's devotees are familiar with events taking place by Ma's 'kheyal'. This word is difficult to translate. It stands for Ma's spontaneous wish, order, or observation, all of



which have their origin in something transcendental and sublime, something that is incomprehensible to the human mind. One cannot understand the workings of Her kheyal, but in the experience of devotees, it has a comforting reassurance. It is always purposeful, though it may not be possible to grasp its import. Circumstances worked out in the best possible manner when they were blessed by Ma's kheyal, or carried out in accordance with it. During the events leading up to Atirudra Mahayajna and during its progress, those close to Ma and working under Her guidance were fully aware of Ma's kheyal on every thing connected with the Yajna.

Since Ma was not keeping well at the time, Brni. Purnananda suggested that the Yajna be held for Ma's health. Ma was not agreeable to this. However, when Brni. Purnananda suggested that the aim of the Yajna be 'vishva kalyan', Ma agreed at once.

Ma had earlier said that women members of the Ashram would be playing a major role in the Yajna, and that is how things seemed to unfold. Members of the Ashram who were not on the Committee, as well as other devotees, both men and women, helped in the preparations too. Some were appointed by Ma for certain tasks and others volunteered with whatever they could do. However, members of the Committee and other women members of the Ashram carried out a major portion of the planning and organisation.

To Beenaji (an ashramite) Ma said, indicating the five Committee members, "These people will be within the Committee and work, and Beena will be outside the



Committee and look after the decoration work." Thus, Beenaji, along with Dr. Km. Bithika Mukherjee (a devotee) organised the flower decorations, buntings, alpana and other decorations. Ma asked Kripalji (an ashramite) to see that the area around the yajnashala was always kept neat and clean.

Although this was an occasion for everyone to work together cheerfully, there were occasions when some people got upset, felt left out, complained or became uncooperative. The matter, of course, would reach Ma. She would soothe ruffled feathers and show ways in which a confrontation could be avoided so that things could proceed in a peaceful manner.

The question once arose of how the brahmacharinis would enter the Yajna premises in case, for some reason, they were unable to use the existing entrance. The yajnashala was situated near Ma's residence. Ma told Brni. Purnananda to have a small gate constructed in the boundary wall of Her residence to facilitate an alternative entry to the yajnashala. The gate would be locked and used only in an emergency. Ma's orders were carried out immediately and, by next morning, the gate and lock were in place.

As mentioned earlier, Ma kept a watchful eye on every detail of the preparations. For example, She said that the wood to be used for havan should be stocked in the same manner as it had been for Smt. Rajaben's yajna. In accordance with Her wishes, the logs were piled one on top of another against a wall. Being out in the open, they ran the risk of being stolen. It was therefore decided that they be marked with lime powder (chuna) so that if some



went missing, it would be noticed immediately. However, lime is not something that should be offered into the fire of a yajna. Ma did not approve of the logs having lime on them and they had to be washed clean!

Some people felt that too much discussion with Ma on matters pertaining to the Yajna was disturbing Her and that She should move to another place for rest and quiet. Ma called each of the Committee members one by one and asked them what they had to say. The brahmacharinis said that it would be impossible to work without Ma's physical presence and immediate guidance. Brni. Purnananda was the last to be called in. She said that if Ma was indeed being troubled, then she would sit outside Ma's room and personally see to it that no one disturbed Her - neither the Committee members nor anyone else. The matter ended there; Ma stayed on in Kankhal and continued to be involved in the preparations.

Just before the Yajna when Ma was in Varanasi, the following words came forth from Her spontaneously - "Makhakaarini shikho riti. Pathakaarini shikho riti."⁴⁸ She asked the Kanyapeeth students to explain what the words might mean but could not get a satisfactory reply. Then, She Herself gave the correct meaning. The words meant, "Learn the way to perform a yajna. Learn the way to walk the Path."

Once during a question and answer session with Ma, someone asked, "What is the fruit of the Yajna that is taking place here? And who will get the fruit?"

⁴⁸ Ma often spoke short, pithy sentences, which held many layers of meaning. Her language, at times, was a mixture of Sanskrit, Bangla and Hindi. The word 'makha' is a Sanskrit word, meaning 'yajna'.



Ma replied, "When you talk of the sankalpa taken in this Yajna - human beings, animals, birds, trees, creepers, plants, whoever are of this universe - their ishtadeva, i.e. the one who does not do 'anisht' for anyone - it is for (obtaining) the love of that (ishtadeva)." (The word 'isht' means that which one desires, and 'anisht' means that which is not desirable.) "In such a situation, who will get the fruit - you only say. It is not as if it (the Yajna) is taking place for any small reason."

Explaining further, Ma said, "What do the clouds that gather in the sky give? Rain. Who gets it? Everyone. The desire to make Bhagavan happy - just like if there is a knot - to go to open it is also bondage - it is just like that - the desire that leads to the extinction of desires. Why do you meditate? Why do you try to abide in the 'svarupa'? Why does this desire arise? For the realisation of Bhagavan.

"The desire that gets you deeper into bondage - that is not worth achieving. If you want to remove that vritti, then what must you adopt? 'That'."

In any yajna, its organisers have to be watchful against the spread of fire. This is especially true if the yajna is being conducted in a temporary yajnasala, where the roof is made of inflammable material. This being the case here too, Ma asked for fire extinguishers, in the form of buckets of milk mixed with water, to be prepared everyday. In addition, a number of pichkaris (water-squirts) were also kept ready.

One day, while the Yajna preparations were in progress, Ma told Brni. Purnananda that She saw fire. It was an indication that there might be trouble. She told Brni.



Purnananda to ask the girls to see what they could do to prevent it. As a result, security arrangements were made in the Ashram and near the yajnashala. The fire brigade was also asked to be on alert. Soon after this, when someone was doing an arati of Ma in Her room, a lighted wick fell on the carpet and burnt a part of it. Those present at the time felt that the danger from fire had been averted due to Ma's grace.

A little before the Yajna started, Ma called the women members of the Ashram and instructed them to work to the best of their ability for the Yajna. She said that even one person's mistake would be considered everyone's mistake. Thus, it was not only brahmacharinis, but also all members of the Ashram, and other devotees who single-mindedly followed Ma's instructions in the days before and during the Yajna. If Ma said that something had to be done, then no matter how difficult it was, it was done.

For those who were not directly involved in the work of the Yajna, Ma said that it was their duty to have darshan of the Yajna. They were to try to imbibe the sense of everything they saw and heard during those days. Moreover, everyone had to undertake at least one parikrama (circumambulation) of the yajnashala. She told everyone to take as many photographs and sound and video recordings of the Yajna as possible. She also said that the bhasma (ashes collected from the kundas after havan) and nirmalya (flowers removed from the idols and vedis etc. after puja) were invaluable. "It will not be possible to get something like it later," She said. Many people took the bhasma as prasad. Many have reported to be cured of diseases by using it.

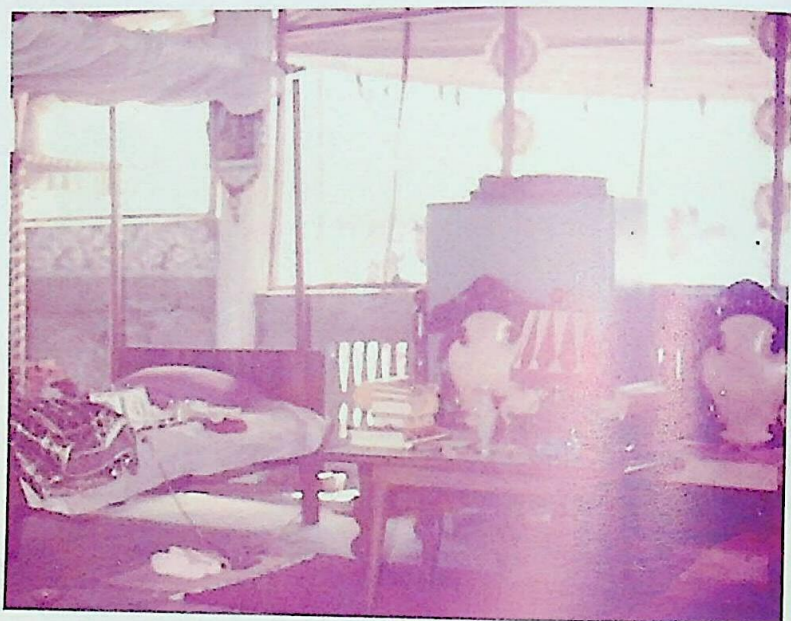




Pt. Vamadeva in discussion with Ma



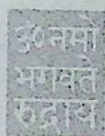
Vasordhara - a ritual of the Uttaranga Pujan



Some of the things which were given in the Shaiyya Dana



The Shankaracharya of Dwarika Sharadapeetha in the Shobha Yatra at the end of the Yajna



VII. Invitations

Shri B. K. Shah suggested that invitations be sent to as many sadhus and mahatmas as possible, so that the entire sadhu community could be represented at the Atirudra Mahayajna. Invitations were also sent to hundreds of Ma's devotees. The language of the invitation was read out to Ma before they were printed, and She made a few changes.

Swami Satchidananda (a dandi swami⁴⁹ of the Ashram) and Swaroop Brahmachari (another member of the Ashram) went personally to invite the Shankaracharyas of Dwarika Sharada Peetha and Sringeri Sharada Peetham. Shankaracharya Shri Abhinavsachchidananda Tirtha of Dwarika agreed to attend. Shankaracharya Shri Abhinava

⁴⁹ A sanyasi who chooses to become a dandi sanyasi has to follow very strict lifestyle rules. He is recognized by the characteristic staff (danda) which he carries with him wherever he goes.



Vidyateertha had a prior appointment, which had been fixed a year ago. However, two special representatives were sent in his place to attend the Atirudra Mahayajna.

भोक्ता स सर्वज्ञानां अङ्कुरः परमार्थतः

प्रिय कल्याणकारी,

अत्यन्त हर्ष के साथ सूचित किया जाता है कि सम्बन्ध २०२८, विद्यान्त युवक अथवा लुनीया ६ मई, १९८१ से १६ मई, १९८१ तक एकदश दिवस लगी अनिरुद्ध महायज्ञ का, श्री श्री मों आनन्दमयी आश्रम, कनकपुर में आयोजन किया गया है।

विद्यारूप-प्राप्तिकारी विद्वत् संस्कृति द्वारा प्रतिष्ठित यज्ञ का साहाय्य सर्वविधित है। आज लोक-जनजीवन में यज्ञ का स्थान गीण हो जाने में हम इस परमात्मामन में अनभिज्ञ हो गये हैं; परन्तु परमात्म्या श्री श्री मों आनन्दमयी की सविधि में हमें इस कार्य में प्रेरणाजन मिला है, अतः हम दृष्टीपूर्व परमात्म्याकारों इस अनिरुद्ध महायज्ञानुष्ठान के विद्यान्त सार्वभौम की सेवा करने के लिए अग्रसर हुए हैं। इस महान युग कार्य में स्थानी परमानन्द जी का आशीर्वादपूर्ण प्रोत्साहन उल्लेख्य है।

तभी से यह प्रार्थना है कि इस महायज्ञ में सम्मिलित होकर आनन्दमान करें।

नारायणकाली

प्रधान

अनिरुद्ध महायज्ञ समिति

प्रत्यक्ष:- जो भवनजन हम अवसर पर कनकपुर आना चाहें, वे कृपया १२ दिवस पहले सूचना अवश्य दें।

अनिरुद्ध महायज्ञ समिति,

श्री श्री मों आनन्दमयी आश्रम,

कनकपुर, हरिद्वार, उ. प्र.

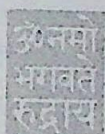
:कार्यक्रम:

१६ फरवरी '८१	१०.०५ प्रातः से १२.१२ दोपहर	भूमि पूजन
५ मई '८१	सर्वप्रायश्चित्त	
	सुषुप्त-०.०० से ११.१०	साय-१.०० से ६.००
६ मई '८१	पूर्वाहु पूजन	वास्तु पूजन
	मण्डप प्रवेश	मण्डप पूजन
७ मई '८१	प्रधान पूजन	गृह योगिनी
	अग्नि स्थापना	देवपाल पूजन
८ मई '८१	पूजन, महाभयाम हवन	हवन
९ से १२ मई '८१	हवन	हवन
१६ मई '८१	उत्सङ्ग	पूर्णार्ति
	शोभायात्रा	यज्ञान्त स्नान

The invitation



Atirudra Mahayajna, Kankhal, 1981



VIII. Preparations

As time progressed, the scale of the function and the huge preparations that were required became apparent. The organisers were quite untroubled because they knew that Ma's grace was always with them. Whenever it seemed as if there was going to be a problem, something would unexpectedly happen to prevent it.

For instance, funds were required but money had yet to be collected even though the yajna was to begin only six months later. On Deepavali day, Friday 7th November 1980, a significant contribution towards the yajna fund was made. Brni. Purnananda was cleaning Ma's room when she found a Re. 1 coin on the floor. She put this into the collection box of the Yajna, as Ma's contribution! After such an auspicious contribution there was, of course, no shortage of funds.

Although money started coming in, the brahmacharinis tried to be economical while making purchases. To start



with, they bought inexpensive and simple things. When Ma saw them, She did not say anything. It was apparent that She did not approve; She wanted things of better quality. The brahmacharinis, sensing Ma's disapproval, returned the articles and bought better ones.

It was difficult to obtain the black sesame and ghee that were required for the shakalya⁵⁰. Brni. Purnananda searched in a few places but could not get the required quality. Someone sent her samples of good quality sesame and said that it was available in Old Delhi. Shri S. K. Dutta went to look for it but could not get the required quantity. One shopkeeper even asked why Shri Dutta wanted to waste money by throwing so much sesame into the fire! Shri Dutta responded by saying that he was out to do what was required. The shopkeeper mellowed down and called up a wholesale dealer who said that he was about to receive a truckload of sesame. However, he could not predict when it would arrive. It was discovered later that the truck would arrive by evening. Someone was sent to Delhi to escort the truck to Kankhal as soon as it arrived.

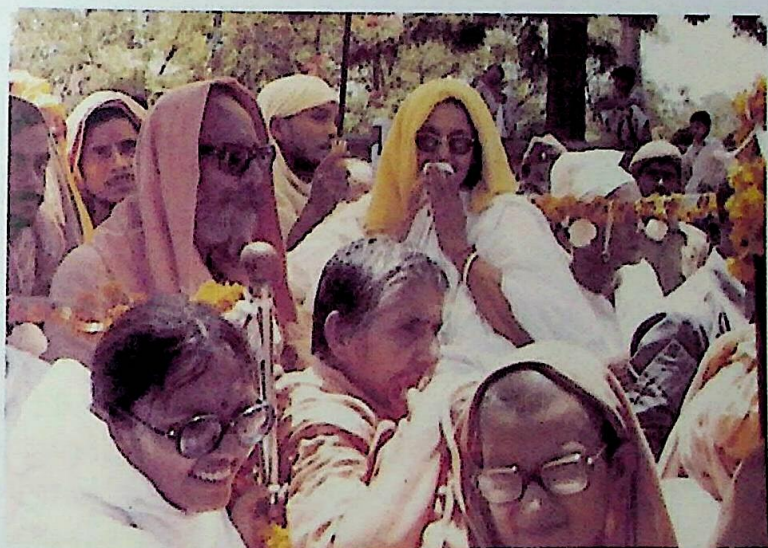
Just like sesame, cow's ghee was also required in huge quantities. For a yajna, even the breed of cows is a matter of concern, as it is better to avoid using ghee prepared from the milk of imported breeds. It is only pure ghee, prepared from the milk of native breeds that can be termed 'aajya'. Shri Chenna Reddy, then Governor of Andhra Pradesh, helped by sending many large tins of ghee. A local dairyman of Kankhal supplied a part of the

⁵⁰ The shakalya offered during ahuti in the Yajna was a mixture of mainly black sesame, rice, barley, cow's ghee and shakkar.

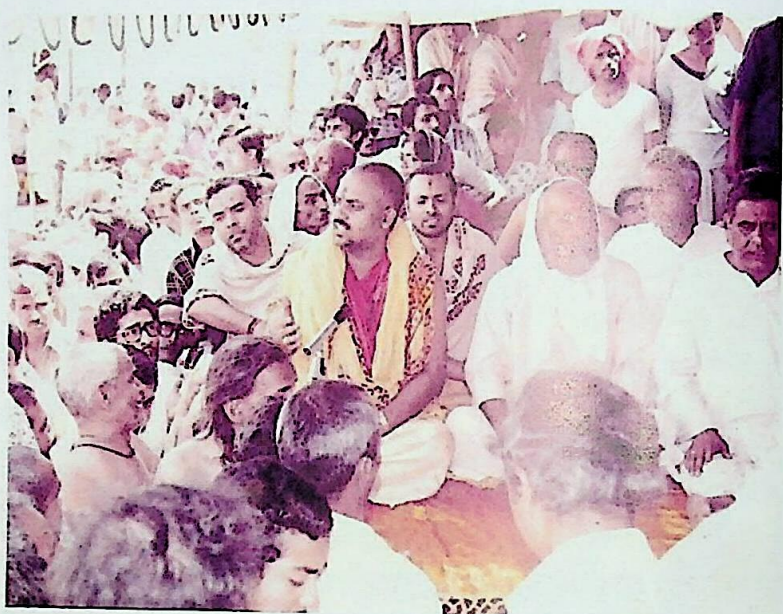




Ma (under the yellow umbrella) in the Shobha Yatra



Ma in the Shobha Yatra; also seen are: Km Aruna Pandya (left), Brni. Purnananda (right), Sw. Sevananda (Udasji) (seated in front of Ma) and Mahant Giridhar Narayan Puri of the Nirvani Akhada (on Ma's right)



Pt. Vamadeva conducting the puja at Brahma Kunda; the Mahant of the Udasin Akhada is seated on his left



Arati of the Ganga and the Avabhrith Snana

requirement. However, ghee had to be brought in from a few other places also, to make up the required quantity.

The brahmacharinis tried to maintain the highest level of cleanliness and purity in all the preparations. For example, the eight women workers who were called from Varanasi to clean, wash and dry the sesame, bathed in the Ganga daily and wore only unstitched clothes while carrying out their work. The sesame was picked by hand and then cleaned in a winnowing tray so that no stones, insects or other impurities remained. It was washed with Gangajala on the banks of the river and dried on the terraces of the Ashram, which had earlier been washed with Gangajala. Wet sesame was spread on cloth, which had also been washed in Gangajala. While the sesame was drying, a constant vigil was kept to see that monkeys and birds did not get to it. The scales and weights used to weigh the sesame were also scrubbed and washed in Gangajala. Ma, who was keeping a watch on everything, enquired about how the sesame was being cleaned. When She was informed about the care being taken, She was extremely happy and remarked, "The effort is to achieve wholeness in this Yajna."

Shortly before the Yajna commenced Ma was in Varanasi. She asked for the puja vessels that had been used for the Akhanda Gayatri Mahayajna⁵¹ to be taken out. She wanted them to be used in the Atirudra Mahayajna. She asked Shri S. C. Banerjee (a devotee) to get a trunk made but did not give any indication as to why She needed it. He had one made, but Ma said that it was too big and a smaller one was required. The second attempt was successful and Ma had the vessels stored in it. She



told Shri Banerjee that the box should reach Kankhal before the Yajna.

Most of the purchasing of articles and materials required for the pujas of the Yajna was done in Varanasi by Km. Nirmal, Brni. Purnananda and Km. Aruna. Many of the items given in the lists at the end of this book were bought here and taken to Kankhal. These included things such as the dhoti-chadar and sari-blouse sets for the devatas; sets of yajna paatra; the different kalashas and other metal vessels for puja and for cooking food for the ritviks; articles to be given in the Varan like dhoti-chadar sets, kusha asanas, japa malas, yajnopavitas; bhojpatra, rope, string, cloth for the flags on the yajnashala and so on. All this made up a formidable amount of luggage. Brni. Purnananda asked Shri Banerjee for help in transporting it from the Varanasi Ashram to the station. Shri Banerjee, who had not seen the luggage, made a mental estimate and asked for two jeeps to be sent as transport. However, a second jeep was not available and a large van was sent instead. When Shri Banerjee saw the luggage, he realized that it was indeed a good thing that the second vehicle was not a jeep but something larger! The luggage was far too much to fit into just two jeeps.

At the station, about twenty-five coolies were required to carry the luggage. There was not enough time to load it onto the train. Therefore, Km. Nirmal, Brni. Purnananda and Km. Aruna took whatever could be loaded. What remained was later brought to Kankhal by Shri Vishnu

⁵¹ A yajna that continued for three years, from 1947 to 1950, in Ma's Ashram in Varanasi.



Pandya (a devotee). Later, Shri Banerjee also carried that trunk full of vessels by train to Kankhal. He realised that had the box been bigger, it would not have fit into the compartment.

Once they reached Kankhal, all the things that had been bought for the Yajna were stored in two rooms near the yajnashala. These rooms lay to the south of the yajnashala. This meant that whenever something had to be brought into the mandap, it entered through the southern door. This was perfect since the prescribed direction from which things should enter the mandap is indeed the south.⁵² However, when it was decided to use those rooms, this fact was not known.

Most of the remaining items were bought in Kankhal itself. Materials required for the pujas like roli, turmeric powder, sandalwood sticks, panchratna, sarvaushadhi, milk, curd, coconuts, flowers and leaves, articles presented during the Shaiyya Dana and so on were obtained locally.

Innumerable other things also had to be organised. For example, five kinds of wood that were to be used for the fires were cut into pieces so that they would fit into the kundas. Logs of mango, khair (acacia), sandalwood, camphor and banyan were cut into sticks measuring 2 -

⁵² The scriptures give very precise rules to be followed in karmakanda. For example, the direction from which priests should enter the mandap, the direction to face when worshipping, the direction from which articles should be brought inside the mandap and so on. Not only are directions stipulated, but also the measurements of the various articles used, the materials from which they are to be made, the order of the ceremonies, and a host of other intricate details are prescribed in the relevant texts. Some of these details are given in this book, but the majority of them are not mentioned here.



2.5 armlengths. One or more kinds of wood may be used in this kind of yajna. The brahmacharinis, wanting to do everything to the highest standards possible, decided to use the five kinds permissible.

Seven kinds of soil were required for a particular puja. They were to be collected from a place where cows are kept (gaushala), from a pond, from a royal gate and from the confluence of rivers. Soil that has been in contact with an elephant's tusk, with horses' hooves and with white ants was also required. Each was available except for that which had been touched by an elephant's tusk. One day Shri S. K. Dutta was travelling by road on official business. On the way, he saw a tusker and its mahout, walking down the side of the road. He stopped the mahout and explained his requirement to him. The mahout immediately obliged by ordering the elephant to sit down. A pile of freshly dug mud happened to be lying nearby. The mahout made the elephant touch it and Shri Dutta brought the mud to Kankhal.

White cotton namavalis⁵³, with the words "Namami Shivam Shivakalpatarum" (Salutations to Shiva, the bestower of all boons!) in red Devanagari letters, were printed. They were given to the ritviks for Varan, to Committee members and other members of the Ashram. Cotton handkerchiefs, similarly printed with the words "Namami Shankaram Priyam" (Salutations to the adorable Shiva!) and the date of the Yajna, were offered during

⁵³ A length of cloth with a holy name, or names, printed on it, mostly worn like a shawl by both men and women.



The permanent yajnashala



A torana, trishul and the shikhar



The northern door representing the Atharvaveda



The southern door representing the Yajurveda



*The western door
representing the
Samaveda*

Sahasrarchana⁵⁴ to Narmadeshvara⁵⁵. Later, they were distributed to the devotees. Gold-plated copper medallion souvenirs, embossed with Lord Shiva's image were presented to sadhus, ritviks and devotees. On Pt. Vamadeva's suggestion, *Vedartha Kalpataru*, a book authored by Pujiyapad Karpatriji, was presented to all the mahatmas who attended.

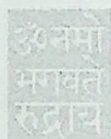


The design printed on the handkerchiefs

⁵⁴ Archana is a special type of puja wherein a particular number of similar articles are offered, one by one, to the deity, accompanied by the appropriate mantras. Sahasrarchana is a thousand such offerings.

⁵⁵ A special stone from the river Narmada, worshipped as a Shiva Linga, a symbol of Shiva. A Narmadeshvara was placed and worshipped on the Pradhan vedi. The idols of Shiva and his family could not be disturbed for rituals like the archana, and hence, such rituals were conducted on Narmadeshvara instead.





IX. The Acharya

As mentioned previously, the acharya heads all the activities within the mandap and takes full responsibility that the rituals are conducted correctly. The title of 'acharya' shows that he knows and follows 'acharan', or proper rules of conduct, and inspires others to follow them too. He also has the ability to collect, and choose between (chayan), the various meanings (artha) of the scriptures. Armed with this knowledge, he can clarify any confusion during the performance of rituals.

Pt. Ranganath had first been approached for information on the Yajna. However, there had been no reply from him. It was towards the end of 1980 Ma and the Committee members were in Varanasi, that the acharya was appointed. Dr. Padma Misra, President of the Committee, was asked to suggest a suitable acharya. The brahmacharinis wanted the decision on the acharya to be



taken in Ma's presence. Dr. Padma Misra suggested a very able pandit living in Varanasi, by the name of Pt. Vamadeva Mishra. She said that her student, Pt. Vyas Mishra, would be able to contact him. Ma observed that if Dr. Padma Misra was suggesting someone, then there could be no doubt about his capability.

At that time, Pt. Vamadeva was in Allahabad on some work. Ma said that the five 'jyotis' ('lights' -- the five Committee members) and three brahmins should go to Allahabad to speak with Pt. Vamadeva. Dr. Padma Misra was unable to go at that time so Km. Bithika went in her place. They were accompanied by Pt. Hridaya Ranjan Sharma, Br. Bhaskarananda and Pt. Vyas Mishra. Ma specifically told them to leave by 11 a.m. Nevertheless, their departure was delayed and by the time they reached Allahabad, Pt. Vamadeva had already left for Lucknow. They thought they would follow him there but learnt that he would soon be leaving Lucknow to go back to Varanasi! Situations like this always arose when Ma's orders were not carried out faithfully. Desired results became more difficult to achieve and, sometimes, impossible. Now everyone had to go back to Varanasi without having accomplished anything. When they reached Varanasi, they went to meet Pt. Vamadeva at his residence. Pt. Vyas Mishra introduced everybody and informed Pt. Vamadeva of the reason for their visit: they had come to gather details of an Atirudra yajna. They also wanted Pt. Vamadeva to come to the Ashram for further discussions as soon as possible.

Shortly thereafter, Pt. Vamadeva came to the Ashram. He went for Ma's darshan and acquainted Her with his lineage. His grandfather had been an Agnihotri brahmin, and both



his grandfather and father were very learned in karmakanda. He had brought with him an ancient handwritten manuscript from which he gave details of the yajna.

While Pt. Vamadeva was still talking, Shri Satyendra Kumar Basu (a devotee) entered with a garland. It was Shri Basu's habit to offer a garland every morning and evening to Ma. He offered the garland to Ma, did pranam and left. At the end of the discussion with Pt. Vamadeva, Ma asked that the garland be given to Pt. Vamadeva. This was an indication that Pt. Vamadeva was chosen as acharya for the Yajna. He was overcome with emotion and chanted Svastivachan⁵⁶ and Vedic mantras to honour Ma. Those present requested him to do ghana paatha⁵⁷. At one point Ma asked whether a particular variation was possible in the rendering of the paatha, and Pt. Vamadeva agreed. Ma recalled that when certain sadhanas⁵⁸ were spontaneously occurring within Her, She would recite mantras such as these.

Pt. Vamadeva was asked to choose dates for the Yajna. He said that he would come the next evening for the decision, as he had to go to Kashi Vidyapeeth in the morning, where he was working as Head of the Sanskrit Department. Saying this, he left. Later in the day, however Ma seemed extremely anxious to fix the dates immediately and did not want to wait even until next evening. The next

⁵⁶ Vedic mantras for felicity, peace and prosperity.

⁵⁷ In order to preserve the accuracy of the mantras in the Vedas, they are memorized in various styles of recitation. One of these styles is the ghana paatha, where the mantras are memorized and recited in a specific, repetitive, back and forth pattern.

⁵⁸ See 'Anandamayee Ma—a Brief Life Sketch' given later in this book.



morning, seeing Ma's anxiety, the Committee members decided to ask Pt. Vamadeva to come earlier in the day. Only Pt. Vyas knew his residence, but he was not available at the time. Just as everyone was wondering what to do, there was a knock on the door of Ma's room and Pt. Vamadeva stood there, panchanga in hand! Everyone was extremely surprised. The acharya said that he had decided to choose the dates for the Yajna before he went to the Vidyapeeth.

On consulting the panchanga⁵⁹, Pt. Vamadeva found that Shuklapaksha Tritiya of Vaisakh, which was also Akshay Tritiya, would be the best day to commence the Yajna. Janmotsava, Ma's birthday celebrations, were to be held from the 2nd to the 23rd of May that year⁶⁰, and would overlap the duration of the Yajna. This coincidence made everyone very happy. Ma was asked where She would be at the time. She replied that She would be wherever the Yajna was being held. Sw. Parmananda was informed of the dates of the Yajna. He said that though there was a proposal to hold Janmotsava in Calcutta that year, it would now have to be held in Kankhal. Ma could then be present for both functions.

A few hours later, a devotee from Pune arrived and told Sw. Parmananda that the Pune devotees wanted the Janmotsava to be held there. The devotee was informed that the venue had already been fixed. Everyone realised the reason for Ma's urgency in choosing the dates for the Yajna.

⁵⁹ This is the traditional Indian calendar in which each day has five parts (pancha+anga). These five parameters are taken into consideration when choosing auspicious dates for a ritual or ceremony.

⁶⁰ The duration of Ma's birthday celebrations every year spans the period between Her birthday according to the Bengali calendar and Her birthday according to the Hindu (Vikrami Era) calendar.



If the decision had not been taken, and devotees had requested Ma to come to Pune or Calcutta for Janmotsava, Ma would not have been able to refuse. How then could She have been present in Kankhal for the Atirudra Mahayajna? However, since the dates had already been chosen, Ma replied, "This sharir will only stay where the girls are."

That Pt. Vamadeva had Ma's blessings was evident throughout the Yajna, and even later. One day, when the Yajna was in progress, Pt. Vamadeva was feeling unwell and felt that he would not be able to attend the afternoon session that day. Ma was informed about it. She sent someone with the message that the acharya should first bathe and then eat only what She would be sending for him. The acharya did not feel like bathing at all but had to comply since the messenger said that it was very necessary and must be done immediately. After his bath, Pt. Vamadeva felt refreshed and hungry, and looked forward to the meal that Ma was going to send for him. When he saw the big, covered thali (metal plate) being brought in, he felt that it was going to be a hearty meal. However, when the thali was uncovered, he saw only a couple of thin slices of apple and a small portion of cottage cheese (paneer)! Pt. Vamadeva recounted to his family later that he felt extremely disappointed, even angry, at the sight of this frugal meal. The person who had brought the meal had been instructed to see that everything was eaten up. As the meal finished however, to his surprise, Pt. Vamadeva felt very satisfied! He was no longer hungry or angry, and felt completely well again.

One of the main features of the Yajna, as recalled by some pandits later, was the command that Pt. Vamadeva

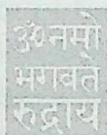


had over the intricacies of karmakanda. Everyone developed great respect for the acharya's punctuality, equanimity and ability to successfully plan and carry through such a huge project.

The following incident gives an idea of the acharya's attention to detail and conscientiousness. One evening when all the pandits were seated for dinner, the acharya noticed that one pandit was missing. He recalled the pandit's name and started to make inquiries about his absence. When Ma heard about this incident, She commended the acharya's capability and skill in being leader of the team as he could name the missing pandit in such a large group!

After the Yajna was over, Pt. Vamadeva asked Ma to give him dakshina. Ma enquired from Brni. Purnananda if the acharya had not been given dakshina. The dakshina had indeed been given and Pt. Vamadeva clarified that it was not the usual dakshina that he meant. What he wanted was a special dakshina from Ma. This special dakshina was that he should be able to have Her darshan whenever he wanted. A few months later, Pt. Vamadeva was to go abroad and he felt an intense desire to have Ma's darshan before he left. A few days later, he found that Km. Nirmal had come to his house in Varanasi with a message that Ma had called for him. Ma wanted him to take another look at the kundas. The permanent construction of the yajnashala was about to begin and someone had remarked that the kundas were not aligned properly. Pt. Vamadeva went to Kankhal and inspected the kundas. He found everything to be in order. When he went to meet Ma to tell Her this, She asked, "Did you not have the desire to see this sharir?"



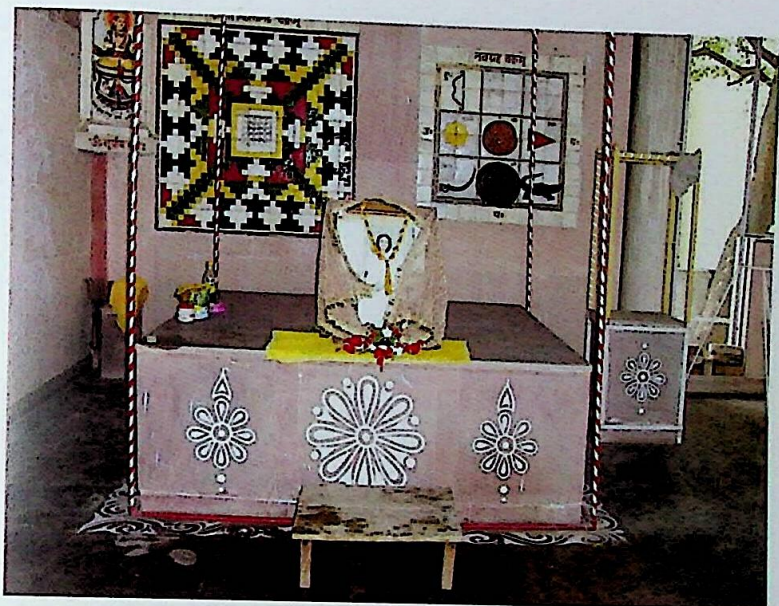


X. The Pandits

The pandits who were to conduct the Yajna were chosen for their learning and skill in karmakanda. These included experts of Vedic chanting as well as singers of the Samaveda. Most of the pandits were residents of Varanasi though they belonged to different parts of India. Some belonged to the northern and some to southern states; there were Maharashtrians, Maithilis, Marwaris and so on, and some from Nepal. There were some who, as a rule, never stepped out of Varanasi but when they heard that Ma was organising the Atirudra Mahayajna, they readily agreed to travel. It also meant a pilgrimage to the holy town of Kankhal and the opportunity to have Ma's darshan. Ninety-five pandits travelled from Varanasi. Two left earlier and the rest, including Pt. Vamadeva, left on the 3rd of May.

Some pandits from Rishikesh and Haridwar were also called in to make up the required number of a hundred

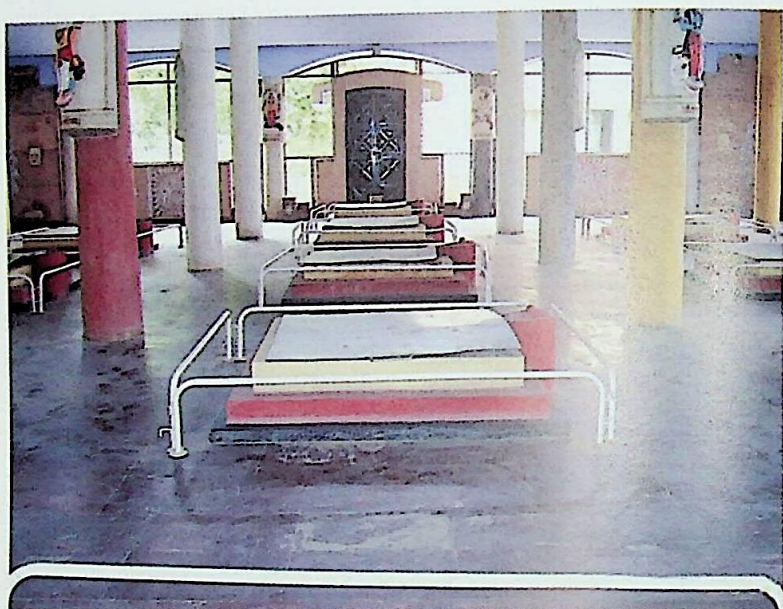




The Pradhan vedi inside - a small puja is carried out everyday on Ma's photograph and the Shivalinga placed there; also seen in the picture are the Navagraha vedi, and reference diagrams of the Dvadasha Lingatobhadra and the Navagraha chakras (on the wall)



The Yogini vedi and its reference chakra (on the wall behind the vedi), and the Matrika vedi



The kundas in a row inside the yajnasala



Another view of the kundas; some of the main pillars can be seen with images of their devatas

and thirty-five. Amongst the inductees, one had a defective eye. It was therefore not possible to include him. It was with great politeness and tact, and after giving him a good amount of dakshina and other presents that this pandit was informed that he would not be required. Thirty-five pandits came from Haridwar and Rishikesh. After Pt. Vamadeva's selection as acharya, Swami Vishnu Ashram (a well known, learned sanyasi from Shuktal) had a discussion with him. He asked him a few questions based on the shastras. Being very impressed with the answers, Sw. Vishnu Ashram offered to send a few pandits to participate in the Yajna. He now sent five from Bulandshahar, bringing the total to a hundred and thirty-five pandits.

About one month before the Yajna was to begin Shri S. C. Banerjee, who lived in Varanasi, was informed about the pandits who were to travel along with Pt. Vamadeva from Varanasi to Kankhal. Shri Banerjee made the train bookings immediately and was assured by the Railways that an entire coach would be made available to them. However, when he checked with the Railway authorities a few days before the date of travel, he was told that they had no information about any such booking and that he would have to go to Lucknow to see if anything could be done about it now. Shri Banerjee went to Lucknow immediately but learnt that there was, currently, a shortage of coaches. He would now have to book the seats individually. To get so many seats reserved at once was impossible, unless someone from the Northern Railway headquarters in Delhi put in a word.

Shri Banerjee was very dejected, and, after sending a message to Ma informing Her about the situation, returned



to Varanasi. He felt as a human being feels when all effort has failed and divine help seems the likely answer. It was, indeed, the answer. One of Ma's devotees, who was a Railway official in Delhi, was informed about the problem. He was able to secure the required coach just in time and the pandits left Varanasi as scheduled.

They arrived in Kankhal on the 4th of May. The next day Pt. Vamadeva formally introduced the pandits to Ma. Amongst them were Veda paathis of all four Vedas. They chanted mantras, in the traditional style and from their respective Veda in Ma's honour. Ma gave them a mango each as prasad. Later in the day, after Dr. Km. Padma Misra, President of the Atirudra Committee, had formally welcomed the pandits, Pt. Vamadeva briefed the pandits, reminding them to play their respective roles in the best possible manner, and to follow his lead during the ceremonies at all times.

Once the Yajna started, the acharya and a few pandits went to Ma every evening. They discussed the day's proceedings as well as the next day's programme. They also reported any problem that they were facing, for which Ma would have a solution and would reply, "It will be done."





XI. Special Invitees

Many religious heads and other well-known people attended the Yajna. Foremost amongst them was Shankaracharya Abhinavsachchidananda Tirtha of the Dwarika Sharada Peetha. Other important mahatmas included Sw. Rama Swarupa Maharaj (Vedanta Sammelan), Sw. Saccidananda Maharaj (Bhola Giri Ashram), Sw. Brahmananda Maharaj (Surat Giri Ashram), Sw. Prakashananda (Jagat Guru Ashram), Sw. Vareshananda (Ramakrishna Mission), Sw. Brajo Kishore Puri Maharaj (Geeta Bhavan), Sw. Brahma Hari Maharaj (Shri Chetan Deva Avadhuta Ashram), the Mahants of the Niranjani, Nirvani and Udasin Akhadas, Sw. Vidyananda Maharaj (Kailash Ashram), Sw. Chidananda (Divine Life Society), Sw. Ganeshananda (Sanyas Ashram), Sw. Vishnu Ashram (from Shuktal), Sw. Gita Bharti (Hariharananda Ashram), Sw. Shyam Sunder Das



(Garib Dasi) and Sw. Akhandananda (from Vrindavan). Some of them attended off and on, while others came regularly. Amongst the VIPs were Giani Zail Singh, Shri G. S. Pathak, Shri Kamlapati Tripathi, Dr. Triguna Sen, and Shri Gulzari Lal Nanda.

However, no one, no matter how highly placed socially or politically, was allowed into the yajñashala or was given any special treatment that would compromise the purity of the rituals. It was only a few who always lived by strict rules, like the Shankaracharya, Sw. Vidyananda, Sw. Chidananda and others, who entered the yajñashala. Additional rules like wearing unstitched clothes and speaking in Sanskrit inside applied to them as well.

Shankaracharya Shri Abhinavsachchidananda Tirtha arrived in Haridwar on the 13th of May. Members of the Niranjani, Nirvani and Udasin Akhadas⁶¹ went to receive him at Haridwar station. A ceremonial procession headed by a bedecked elephant and with sadhu outriders on horseback holding swords accompanied him for part of the way from the station to the Ashram. The procession included people carrying his ceremonial umbrella, staff, flywhisk and other ceremonial objects. He was also escorted by the Ashram kirtan group, Shri B. K. Shah (President of the Anandamayee Sangha), and many volunteers. Ma accorded the Shankaracharya a ceremonial welcome in the Shankaracharya Hall of the Ashram. She asked Brni. Purnananda (a brahmin naishtik brahmacharini, who

⁶¹ The Akharas are organisations of Hindu monks, originally created some centuries ago, for protecting the religion. Thus, while they carry out religious activities, they also train in combat. The most prominent Akharas are the Niranjani, Nirvani, Udasin and Juna Akharas.





The ceiling of the yajñashala



The parikrama path on the eastern side; at the far end where the path turns right...



*... stands the hibiscus tree which
Ma said should not be cut down*



*The pole on which the mahadhrva was
hoisted*

wore a yajnopavit) to do his arati. An assembly of twenty-four Mahamandaleshvaras⁶² was also there to welcome the Shankaracharya. Small kumaris, each carrying a small kalasha of water on her head, led him to his living quarters in the Ashram.

The Shankaracharya resided in the Ashram for four days until the end of the Yajna. He attended both the sessions each day and would chant mantras along with the ritviks. He expressed his admiration for Pt. Vamadeva's abilities, his learning and his chanting. The Shankaracharya was also pleased to see that the Dvadasha Lingatobhadra chakra⁶³ was being worshipped on the main vedi. The Dvadasha Lingatobhadra, which represents the twelve lingas, is a very detailed diagram. It is not commonly used in ceremonies because it requires great expertise to construct and worship.

Every evening after havan, some of the invited mahatmas would give a talk. The Shankaracharya spoke on the Yajna or on Adi Shankaracharya. On the last day of his stay, he gave a talk on Ma. Shri Brahma Hari Maharaj spoke on the question of whether spending so much on pure ghee for a yajna was justified. He explained that since householders are supposed to offer one-tenth of their income to God, their spending on large-scale yajnas that are a form of worship and also benefit the entire world

⁶² The learned ascetics chosen and given special importance by the Akhadas are known as Mahamandaleshvaras.

⁶³ A chakra is a mystical, abstract diagram which represents a particular deity surrounded by his or her attendant divinities and powers. The worship of the deity through his or her chakra is carried out in many rituals and is a very specialised, step-by-step process.



was very much in order. Sw. Brahmananda explained the reasons for the failure of the ancient yajna organised by Daksha: the object there had been to insult Shiva. Sati had tried to atone for Her father's mistake by sacrificing Her life. Sw. Brahmananda said that here Shakti Herself was holding a Yajna to worship Shiva and to bring peace to humankind. This Yajna, therefore, was bound to be successful.

At the end of the Yajna, as per Ma's instructions, the Shankaracharya along with the Mahamandaleshvaras and heads of religious organizations, about thirty in all, were honoured in a special ceremony. Ma instructed Brni. Purnananda to present them with gifts of a chadar, sandalwood garlands, fruits, dried fruits, sweets, and a medallion with Lord Shiva's image embossed on one side. The words "Namami Shivam Shivakalpatarum, Ati Rudra Mahayajna, Kankhal 1981" in Devanagari script were written on its reverse. The Shankaracharya left on the 16th, the last day of the Yajna.





XII. Building the Yajnashala

When choosing the venue for the Yajna, Ma had suggested three places - Vrindavan, Varanasi and Kankhal. Brni. Purnananda felt that Kankhal would be more convenient because of their familiarity with the place. In addition, the Ganga flows just a few metres from the Ashram and it would be easy to bring Gangajala for the ceremonies. After some discussion between them, it was decided that the Yajna would be held in Kankhal.

In Kankhal, Ma told Brni. Purnananda to ask Br. Bhaskarananda to get a mason and measure the area in which the yajnashala was to be constructed. The area lay just behind Ma's residence and it was She who chose the spot. The measurements showed that a yajnashala of the dimensions required by Pt. Vamadeva would comfortably fit into it. The dimensions of a yajnashala are traditionally calculated based on the length of the yajman's arm, from the elbow to the tip of the small finger.



Ma also told Brni. Purnananda that if Sw. Paramananda suggested having the Yajna on the land on which Ma's museum now stands, which is just across the road from the yajnashala, Brni. Purnananda should not agree. She should insist that they have it at the spot that Ma had chosen. Sw. Paramananda did suggest the other place and Brni. Purnananda replied just as Ma had wanted her to. The chosen piece of land belonged to Smt. Sunayana Mehta, Shri B. K. Shah's daughter. When asked if it could be used for the yajnashala, she willingly consented.

The Atirudra Mahayajna was thus performed in a place where the Ganga flows on either side. Technically the shore of a river extends up to a distance of 150 armlengths from the edge of the waters as they swell on Krishna chaturdashi in the month of Bhadrapada⁶⁴. With the Ganga flowing on either side, and within the above-mentioned distance, the place where the yajnashala is built is, as it were, within the Ganga itself. It would have been hard to find a better location than this.

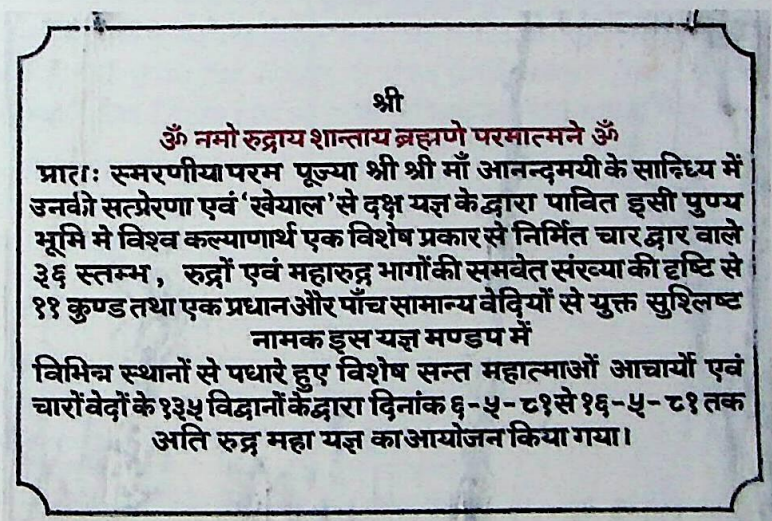
The place where the yajnashala was to be constructed had to be cleared and some plants had to be uprooted. Some people objected to this. However, Ma had said that anything that needed to be done to clean the place for the construction of the yajnashala should be done. Ma had earlier indicated that the yajnashala formed a very important part of the Yajna. The Bhumi Pujan, begun in an auspicious muhurat was conducted under the expert guidance of Pt. Vamadeva.

⁶⁴ The fourteenth day of the dark fortnight in the Hindu lunisolar calendar month of Bhadrapada (part August - part September).





The gate of the yajjnashala



The first of two marble plaques near the yajjnashala. They give details of the structure and the Yajna

सतयुगमेंनियम निष्ठापूर्वकआयोजित याज्ञिक विधियोंद्वारा
यहाँ प्रतिदिनदोउपवेशनोंमें ११ दिनों तक याज्ञिक कार्यक्रम अनुसार
पूजन, वेद परायण हवनादि कार्य चेष्टा पूर्वकसविधि
सम्पन्न किये गए।

इस अद्भुत महानकार्य तथा परम पूज्या श्री श्री माँ के 'स्वेयाल'
का चिरस्थायी ऐतिहासिक पुण्य स्मृति में उनके दिव्य कर कर्मलों द्वारा
आशिर्वाद प्राप्त कर इस यज्ञ मण्डप को पुनः निर्मित कराकर
४-५-८४ से १४-५-८४ तक आयोजित अमिषेकात्मक अतिरुद्र यज्ञ
महोत्सव समारोह सम्पन्न हुआ।

आचार्य डा० वामदेव मिश्र
वेदाचार्य वाराणसी

अतिरुद्र महायज्ञ ट्रस्ट
श्री श्री माता आनन्दमयी आश्रम
कनरवल - हरिद्वार

The second plaque

ॐ माँ
मृत्योर्मा अमृत गमय
प्रातः स्मरणीया परमाराध्या श्री श्री आनन्दमयी माँ
के
'स्वेयाल' से
अतिरुद्र महायज्ञ ट्रस्ट द्वारा निर्मित
अतिरुद्र यज्ञशाला का
अवैतनिक सहयोगी मण्डल
श्री अच्युत पी० कानविन्दे आर्किटेक्ट
श्री वी० अनन्तनारायणन आडिटर
श्री स्वामी जगदीश्वरानन्द सरस्वती - चीफ एकाउन्टेण्ट
श्री एस० के० दत्त मुख्य सहायक
ड्रस्ट के सदस्य
पदमा मिश्रा
पारुल बैनर्जी
पूर्णानन्द
निर्मल हण्डू
अरुणा पाण्डया

Another plaque listing the
names of people
responsible for the
construction of the
permanent yajnashtala

Later, after the Yajna was over, and during Bhumi Pujan of the permanent yajnashala, Ma clapped Her hands and said, "Who knows, this may have been the very place of Sati!" As mentioned earlier, the Daksheshwar Temple is situated just a few meters ahead of the Ashram.

The yajnashala was built strictly according to the design and measurements laid down in the scriptures. The length, breadth and height of the structure; the number, position and colour of the pillars; the colour and position of the doors; the dimension and position of the kundas as well as many other details like the type of materials used and so on, were all in accordance with the requirements of the scriptures. Pt. Vamadeva gave the details for its plan. Work on the architectural drawing started with the help of a draughtsman in Shri S. C. Banerjee's office in Varanasi. At that time, Ma was in Jaipur. One day Shri S. K. Dutta called Shri Banerjee from Delhi requesting that the plan be completed and sent to him within two days since he was going to Jaipur. He would thus be able to show the plan to Ma. There was still a lot of work to be done but, as with all other things associated with the Yajna, it was finished on time and reached Shri Dutta just as he was leaving for Jaipur.

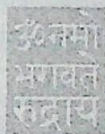
Pt. Vamadeva had checked the plan in Varanasi before it was sent and, when requested, had expressed his satisfaction by signing on it. In Jaipur, Shri Dutta showed the plan to Ma. Many others also gathered around to see it. Some people started finding fault with the plan. Eventually Ma pointed to Pt. Vamadeva's signature and asked what it was. On being told, she said, "When Pitaji has seen it then there is nothing left to be said."⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Ma often referred to male devotees and visitors as 'Pitaji' or 'Baba', meaning 'Father'.



While the construction of the yajnashala was in progress, a couple of people including Sw. Paramananda kept an eye on the construction. Swamiji, who had vast experience in such matters, suggested that iron rods be used to strengthen the pillars. This reinforcement was just as well since the yajnashala had to stand up to severe storms during the Atirudra Mahayajna. Nanha Mistry, a mason from Vrindavan, was in charge of the construction. However, some problems were noticed during construction. The pits were not centred properly and their height was not according to plan. Moreover, Shri S. C. Banerjee remembered Pt. Vamadeva saying that the yajman suffers if there is any fault in the construction of the yajnashala. It is also said that the full benefit of a yajna cannot be obtained if there is any shortcoming in the construction. When the flaws were pointed out, Nanha Mistry was annoyed. He felt that there was not enough time to redo the kundas. Then Ma said that a 'sadachari' (one of good conduct) brahmin should be asked to make the kundas instead. She asked for Trivediji, a contractor in Neemsar, to be called in and to bring with him a brahmin mason to do the job. Ma's wishes were followed. Trivediji rectified and completed the kundas.





XIII. The Yajrashala

The yajrashala was a temporary construction of mud and wire mesh walls with a three-tiered, sloping straw roof. The gaps between each tier facilitated ventilation. Each yajna mandap has a name depending upon its construction. This mandap, a Sushlisht mandap, was a square, with each side measuring 67.5 ft. It had thirty-six pillars, eleven kundas and four doors. The pillars were painted in specific colours. Sixteen of these pillars were very important; devatas were invoked into them and worshipped. The pillars were also decorated with pictures of their devatas.

There were five kundas in the centre of the mandap, in a row running north to south. There was a row on either side, with three kundas each. The structure and dimensions of the kundas were as follows. Each kunda had five parts. (1) The Khaat, or the pit, measured 36" x 36" x 36". (2) The



Kanth, or the part that was at ground level, measured 1.5". (3) The first mekhala, or step, measured 6", the second mekhala, 4.5" and the third, 3". Each mekhala was of a specific colour. (4) The yoni, the heart-shaped structure, measured 12" x 18" x 18". (5) The nabhi, a small area on the floor of the kunda, measured 6" x 6" x 3". The devata of each of these parts was worshipped before Agni was installed in the kunda. It is very important that by the end of the yajna, the ahuti that has been collecting in a kunda reaches the kanth. The dimensions of the kundas are calculated keeping this in mind. A brass pot with a tiny hole at its bottom was tied above each kunda. These vessels were later filled with ghee that fell, drop by drop, into the fires below.

Four doors, each made from a particular wood, opened into the four main directions⁶⁶. The devata of each door was worshipped before the Yajna commenced. Each door represented a Veda. The eastern door represented Rigveda. The western represented Samaveda; it was the main entrance as well as the starting point of parikrama⁶⁷. The southern represented Yajurveda and the northern, Atharvaveda. On either side of each door, a kalasha⁶⁸ marked with a svastika and topped with mango leaves, a coconut, and a garland was installed. Materials for havan and articles for the pujas entered the mandap by the

⁶⁶ A main direction is called a disha; an intermediate direction, a kona.

⁶⁷ A parikrama is the clockwise circumambulation of a sacred spot or object which confers great merit upon its performer.

⁶⁸ A pot filled with water, and often with other auspicious things too, which is then consecrated and used in rituals.



southern door. The acharya and other ritviks entered the mandap through the western door. The yajman also entered by the western door.

In front of each door, there was a wooden torana (gateway) which was constructed from a specific wood. 'Susharmatoranaya namah', 'subhadratoranaya namah', 'sudridhatoranaya namah' and 'sukshetratoranaya namah' were written on the toranas. The devatas of the toranas protect the mandap and the rituals within. They were worshipped before the Yajna started.

A string tied on the toranas prevented people from entering the mandap. A low bamboo fence, constructed a couple of feet away from the outer walls of the yajnashala, prevented anyone from touching the yajnashala while doing parikrama or at any other time. Whether the pujas and havans were in progress or not, the purity of the yajnashala had to be maintained. Only the ritviks and a few others, were allowed to touch the structure. On the outer periphery of the roof, rectangular and triangular cloth flags of specific colours were mounted on bamboo poles. They bore the symbols and weapons of the devatas who resided within.

The Sushlisht mandap within the yajnashala had six vedis, or altars, on which different devatas were invited to take their seat, and worshipped while the Yajna was in progress. Each vedi was a raised platform of specific dimensions, situated in a particular direction of the mandap. Before the devatas were invited, each vedi was covered with a white cloth, on which a particular chakra, or mystical diagram, was drawn with coloured rice grains. The design and colours of each chakra, the details of which



are well defined in the scriptures, were special to the particular devata who was worshipped on the vedi. A ritually sanctified kalasha was placed on each vedi; on each kalasha was placed a simhasana (throne) with an image of the main deity of the vedi. A yellow or white cloth, beautifully decorated with gold trimmings, hung above each vedi. The six vedis were as follows:

1) The Matrika vedi was in the south-eastern corner, or the aagneya kona, of the mandap. Mother goddesses, viz. the Shodasha (sixteen) Matrikas and the seven Saptaghrita Matrikas, were worshipped here, along with Ganesha.

2) The Yogini vedi was also in the south-eastern corner. Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati along with their shaktis, the sixty-four Yoginis, were worshipped here. Yogini and Kshetrapala devatas are gana devatas i.e. devatas who, because of certain similarities between them, are worshipped as a 'gana' or a group.

3) The Vastu vedi was in the south-western corner, the nairritya kona. Vastu is an area on which there is no construction. When something is constructed on such land, its devata, Vastudevata, is appeased through worship. The Vastu vedi had forty-five devatas who were worshipped to ward off any problems arising from the construction of the yajnasala.

4) The Pradhan vedi, or the main vedi, was in the north-eastern corner, or the ishana kona, of the mandap. This vedi was the seat of the main devata of this function, for whose blessings the Yajna was being conducted. The Dvadasha Lingatobhadra chakra was drawn on this vedi. A silver kalasha was installed on this chakra. On the



kalasha was placed a silver plate with the yantra of the main devata drawn on it. On this plate was placed a simhasana with small idols of Shiva, Parvati and Ganesha. Nandi sat by their side. The Dvadasha Lingatobhadra chakra is drawn for the worship of Shiva, who is this chakra's main devata. As is explained in Pt. Vamadeva's article earlier, Shiva and Rudra are but two facets of the same Reality, one being gentle and the other fierce.

5) The Navagraha vedi was also in the north-east (ishana kona), but to the south of the main vedi. On this vedi were installed and worshipped the devatas (adhidevata and pratyadhidevata) who support the nine grahas or planets. The panchalokapalas were also worshipped here. A kalasha for asankhyat Rudra was also established and worshipped here. This kalasha represents Shankara, and is worshipped in all yajnas, whoever the main devata of the yajna might be.

6) The Kshetrapala vedi was installed in the north-west, or the vaayavya kona. On this vedi the Kshetrapala and his forty-nine attendants were worshipped. The Kshetrapala is the protector of a particular physical area, and has to be duly honoured when the area is being utilised. Thus, the Kshetrapala of the ground on which the Yajna was to take place as well as its surrounding areas was worshipped.

Originally, a brass kalasha was to be installed on the main vedi. Km. Aruna wanted that a silver kalasha be used instead, and mentioned this to Ma. Ma gave twenty thousand rupees for its purchase. It was ordered from Delhi. However, when it arrived, it was found to have a tiny hole in it and so it had to be returned. Ma had a silver kalasha



that had earlier been given to Her by Br. Bhaskarananda's family. She asked for it to be used now. It could hold the required volume of five-and-a-quarter litres of water. After the Yajna, the kalasha was returned to Ma and its price was given to the acharya⁶⁹.

Small vedis, each with a kalasha, were installed in ten directions within the mandap. The Dashadikpalas, or guardians of the ten directions, were worshipped here. Directly above each kalasha, on the roof, the dhvaja and pataka (cloth flags) of these Dashadikpala devatas were fixed.

The mahadhvaja was hung from a tall bamboo pole and stood outside on the north-eastern side of the yajnashala. To the edge of its rectangular flag were tied a small chanvar (flywhisk), a ghanti (bell) and some ghungroos (small round bells). The mahadhvaja is very important as it protects the yajnashala and the rituals being conducted inside from being destroyed by rakshasas. Devatas reside in the mahadhvaja were worshipped when it was set up. In a similar manner, the dhvajas of the other devatas protect against demonic entities.

The whole mandap was decorated with buntings and garlands made from flowers and sandalwood. The walls were decorated with drawings of Shaiva symbols like trishul, dhatura flowers, bael leaves and damaru on the outside. Inside, the walls carried alpana designs. Devotees could enter the mandap to see the decorated walls, vedis,

⁶⁹ According to tradition, all that is left in the yajnashala after a yajna is over, belongs to the acharya. In case there is something which cannot be given to him, its cost in money is given instead.

The Vedamurtis



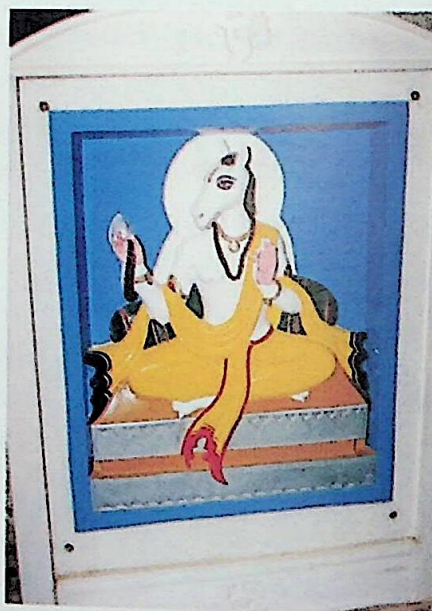
A verse describing the Vedamurti of the Rigveda



Vedamurti of the Rigveda



A verse describing the Vedamurti of the Yajurveda



Vedamurti of the Yajurveda

kundas and pillars only until the 5th of May. Once the ceremonies began, only the participating ritviks and a few others were allowed in. Moreover, only brahmmins could enter, whether the Yajna was in progress or not. Even they had to purify themselves with Gangajala before entering. The language spoken inside was to be only Sanskrit and one was to speak only when necessary. No one was allowed to enter after eating cereal. Ma had prohibited the ritviks from having tea if they were taking part in the Yajna. Thus, they would come to the mandap in the morning without eating or drinking anything. The ritviks and all others who entered the yajnashala remained on phalahara all day, eating a full meal only at night.

Anyone entering the mandap had to be wearing only unstitched clothes. Ma taught the members of the Committee (who had to enter the Yajna premises for various tasks) a special way of wearing a length of cloth so that movement was free and it also looked modest. Ma Herself used to wear a cloth in this way during Her sadhana in Her younger days. She gave each member of the Committee Her own chadar (a piece of cloth used for draping like a shawl) to wear.

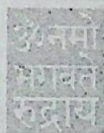
Two days before the Yajna started, Ma gave Brni. Purnananda a silver simhasana, which weighed about two kilograms. This was to be placed on the main vedi. Ma asked Brni. Purnananda to get a mattress and pillows made for it. On seeing the simhasana, the brahmacharinis realised that the Shiva and Parvati idols they had ordered for the main vedi, and which would be placed in this simhasana, would be too small. Shri S. K. Dutta was asked to order another set. He ordered them from a jeweller in



Delhi who he was sure would deliver in time. When asked for the size, Shri Dutta gave a size he thought would be correct, although he had not yet seen the simhasana. The golden idols arrived only on the morning of the 6th of May, and to everyone's surprise, were just the right size! Shiva's statue was the biggest, Parvati's was half of that, and Ganesha's, half of Parvati's. The brahmacharinis already had a silver statue of Nandi. It was later found that the proportion and composition of the statues was just what the scriptures recommended.

Once the Yajna had begun, there were many valuable things like the gold idols, silver vessels, and supplies of ghee and other materials in the yajnashala. Since the yajnashala was a temporary construction, it was necessary for reasons of security for someone to sleep inside the yajnashala at night. Pt. Vyas, who was not part of the team of ritviks, happened to ask Ma if She had any instructions for him. She immediately replied that he should sleep inside the yajnashala every night. The yajnashala was full of devatas who had been invited and who would reside there until the end of the Yajna. Pt. Vyas was in a dilemma. In which direction should he point his feet while sleeping? He told Ma about this problem, and She said that he would be able to understand what to do on his own once he was inside. Pt. Vyas says that this is indeed what happened. He lay down in a direction in which his feet were towards the devatas who were farthest from him. He was given a new set of clothes and new bedding to use each night that he slept in the mandap.





XIV. Yajna in Progress

From the 7th of May onwards, there was one session of puja and havan in the morning and a second in the afternoon. Ma's birthday celebrations had already commenced five days earlier i.e. from the 2nd of May. The Ashram was milling with scores of devotees from all parts of India and abroad. Members of Ma's various Ashrams and students from the Kanyapeeth in Varanasi had also arrived.

The organisers tackled a huge amount of work as preparation for the daily rituals. Not only were a variety of things bought and collected, they were also washed, cleaned, sorted out, arranged, carried to the mandap and put in place there. For example, wood was carried inside; shakalya was prepared; things to be offered for the archana were sorted out; the fruits to be offered to the devatas were washed and put in their proper places; and the flowers



garlands and sweets to be offered to the devatas were arranged nicely. In addition, Gangajala was brought and strained before use, the lamp and other things for arati and other pujas were prepared and money was kept aside in the required amounts for the pujas, daily Varan and dakshina. All this was done well in time everyday so that there was no interruption in the flow of ceremonies.

By evening, the floor of the yajrashala was covered with flowers and shakalya. These flowers and shakalya were not thrown away but collected and kept aside. They were be duly disposed of in the Ganga on the last day. The floor was wiped with cloth dusters. Any washing up inside was done only with Gangajala. Km. Geeta Banerjee, Km. Jaya Bhattacharya (members of the Kanyapeeth) and Brni. Purnananda carried out this task everyday. Vessels that had been used for the pujas were also cleaned and the mandap duly prepared for the next day's ceremonies.

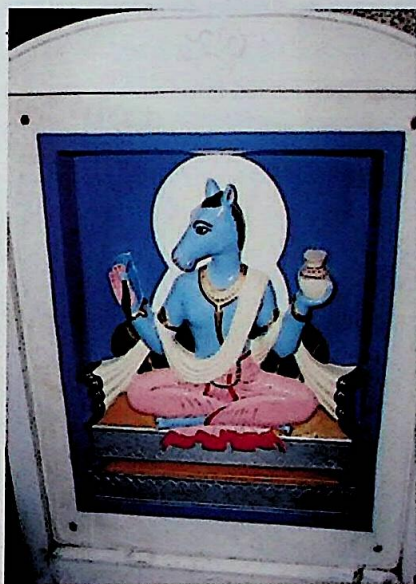
One day, while sorting and preparing bael leaves for archana, Km. Aruna found three stems with nine leaves each. Stems with three leaves are common and those with other numbers are also seen. However, those with nine leaves were seen for the first time. Km. Aruna showed them to Ma. Ma showed them to Pt. Vamadeva who said that nine was the perfect number. Ma said that after they had been offered in the Sahasrarchana, they should be kept by Pt. Vamadeva.

Every evening there was satsang in the Hall of the Ashram. Devotees and guests gathered to hear the acharya, or one of the pandits, speak on some aspect of the Yajna. On some occasions, Sw. Vishnu Ashram or Shri Narayan Goswami gave a talk. While Shankaracharya





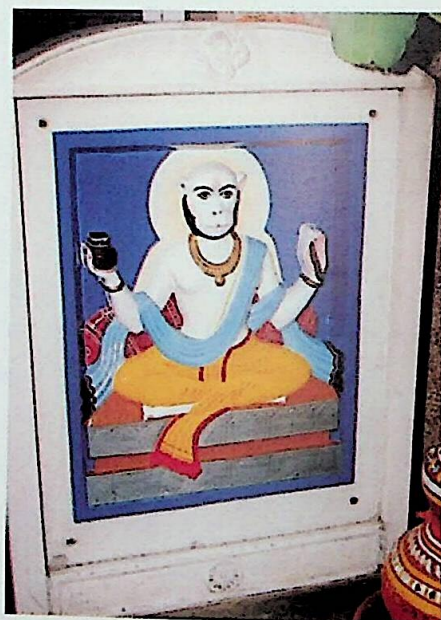
*A verse describing the Vedamurti of
the Samaveda*



Vedamurti of the Samaveda



*A verse describing the Vedamurti of the
Atharvaveda*



Vedamurti of the Atharvaveda

Abhinavasachidananda Tirtha was there, he gave a talk everyday. On many evenings, Veda paatha and shastrartha, or debate upon the scriptures, were also held. Ma made it a point to grace these occasions.

During the course of the Yajna, the brahmacharinis wanted to worship Ma in the form of Shiva⁷⁰. Km. Bishuddha Chakraborty (member of the Kanyapeeth) ordered costume replicas of items associated with Shiva, like the third eye, matted locks, a spout symbolising the Ganga made of silver, a silver crescent and armbands in the form of serpents, from Calcutta. Other symbols like the drum, a statue of Nandi, a trident, serpentine ring and a rudraksha necklace were bought in Kankhal. Ma, on Her cot in the verandah of Her residence, Matri Nivas, held the trident and drum in Her hands. The matted locks, third eye and other symbols of Shiva were put on Her. She began to resemble Lord Shiva. The kamandala and Nandi were placed near Her. (Ma later sent the marble Nandi statue to the Shiva temple in Her Ashram in Agartala.) Ma looked at all the things with great interest. She also sounded the drum. Km. Geeta performed puja on Ma as others sang Shiva stuti and bhajans. Soon Ma's expression became serious as though She was going within Herself. At one point She looked all around and closed Her eyes. She became very still and totally withdrawn. Everyone knew that Ma was in 'bhava'⁷¹. The atmosphere became charged

⁷⁰ It was customary for Ma's devotees to worship Her in the form of various devatas. The devotees would use symbols of the particular devata and worship Her with the appropriate rituals.

⁷¹ Ma would go into a deep spiritual trance, a state which was described as 'bhava' by Her devotees, when puja was performed on Her, or during kirtan and on other such occasions.



and everyone chanted "Jai Shiva Shankara, bom bom Hara Hara!" When the arati was over, Sw. Sevananda (Udasji, an ashramite) gently shook Ma in order to rouse Her. Ma opened Her eyes and went into Her room, still in bhava.

Additional ceremonies took place in the Ashram during the course of the Yajna. On one day, a hundred and eight young kumaris and eleven batuks (little boys, one for every ten kumaris) were worshipped in the Hall. The costumes for the kumaris had been specially ordered from Nathdwara. Later, Ma told the kumaris and batuks, as well as the Kanyapeeth students, to perform parikrama of the yajnashala. A feast was also held, over two days, for a hundred and eight dandi sanyasis. Dandi sanyasis, as mentioned earlier, follow very strict lifestyle rules and great care was taken in preparing a meal for them. Special earthenware kamandalas were ordered and presented to them. Ma herself gave the design for the kamandalas. The sanyasis were also presented with clothes, fruits, sweets, dry fruits and dakshina as well as the customary flower and sandalwood garlands.

One day, Ma instructed members of the Ashram to worship the Sun. Facing East they did arati of the Sun with a lamp. Ma told them to pray with the words, "O Atirudra Bhagavan! May the light of atmajyoti be illumined in our hearts!"

Inviting brahmins for a ritual feast, called a Brahmin Bhojana, is a very important part of a yajna. Ma was very keen that this ritual takes place and appointed Km. Chandan Bhattacharya (a brahmacharini) to look after the arrangements. Ma told Km. Bithika to be in charge of the



store. She would take out the required amount of food stocks everyday, get the vegetables chopped, look after the cooking utensils and so on. According to the scriptures, the number of Brahmins to be invited for the Brahmin Bhojana is calculated according to the scale of the havan or yajna of which this feast is a part. It is based on the total number of ahutis offered. Each ahuti is, of course, accompanied by a single mantra. One-tenth of the number of ahutis (or mantras) forms the number of mantras used in the ritual of tarpana (a ritual to satisfy the devatas and a part of the Yajna). One-tenth of the number of mantras used for tarpana is the number of mantras used in the ritual of marjana (a ritual to purify oneself that was also performed here). A further one-tenth of the mantras used for marjana are the number of brahmins who are invited. Therefore, a total of two thousand and eight hundred brahmins were invited for Brahmin Bhojana during this Yajna. Between two hundred and three hundred⁷² brahmins were given a meal everyday. Dakshina was also presented to them. The premises of the Daksheshwar Temple were used for the meal, though the arrangements were made by the Ashram.

Other than the Brahmin Bhojana, meals were served to different groups of people everyday. The meals were prepared in different kitchens. Ma had appointed Sw. Swarupananda (a sadhu of the Ashram) to look after the general kitchen. More than a hundred people, guests and

⁷² The total number of ahutis was 2,419,758. The above calculation would give a figure of 2419 but, as is generally the case, a few extra people partaking of the meals is not a problem; a number lower than the required number is not acceptable.



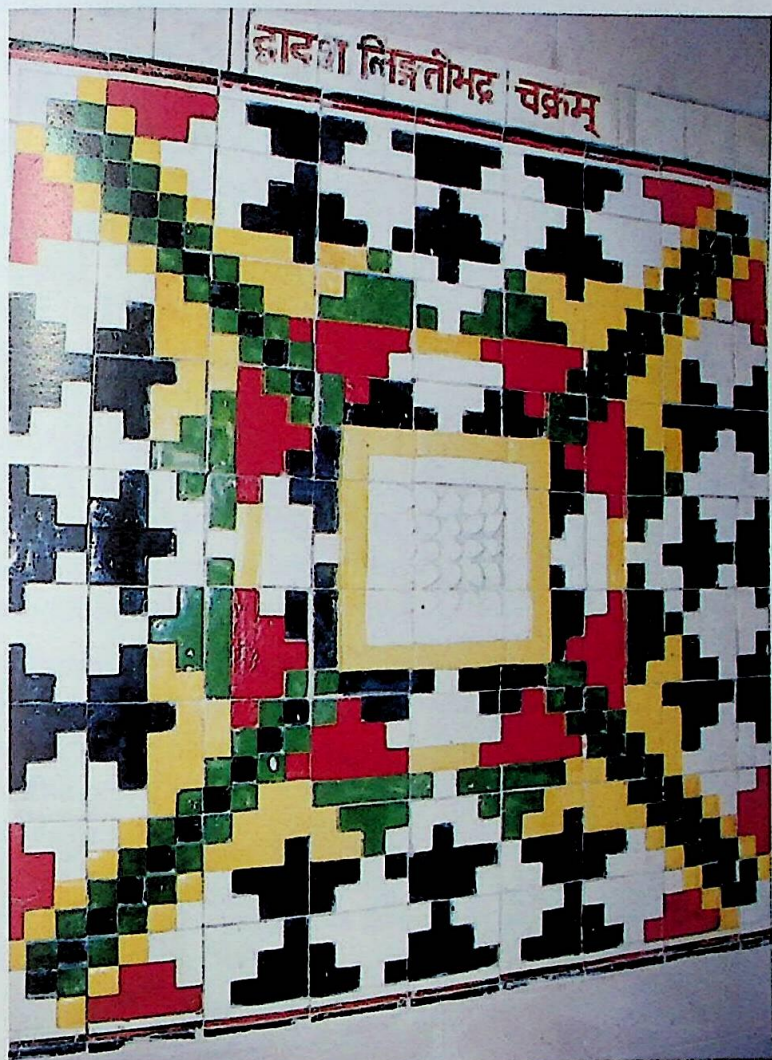
devotees, ate from this kitchen everyday. Arrangements for the meals for VIPs were made in the Old Guest House. On Ma's instructions, food for foreign devotees was cooked in the rooms of the Sheetala Ma Mandir nearby. Brahmachari Panu (a member of the Ashram) was in charge of the preparations of the visiting sadhu's meals. Most of the pandits were staying at the nearby Udasin Akhada, also called the Bada Akhada, and they had their meals there. The acharya and his close helpers were staying in rooms in the Daksheshwar Temple. They too ate in the Bada Akhada. Phalahara was cooked separately for those who fasted for the duration of the Yajna. Renudi (a member of the Ashram) and Kripalji were in charge of these meals. Members of the Ashram and shuddhacharis⁷³ ate from the special kitchen in which bhoga is prepared for Lord Shiva of the Shiva Temple in the Ashram. Truckloads of fruits and vegetables for these different kitchens running during those eleven days were brought in from wholesale markets in Delhi.

Ma taught the brahmacharinis how to segregate the fruit that was brought in, into different categories. The fruit that was to be used as offerings in the ceremonies was kept separately. Another category was for visiting mahatmas, their attendants and other VIPs. A third category was for the general public. Yet another category was for Brahmin Bhojana and for phalahara. Ma herself supervised the distribution and ensured that no fruit was spoilt or wasted. In case there was some fruit which did rot, it was either fed to animals (if it was good enough for

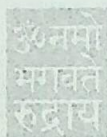
⁷³ Those who follow strict rules to maintain the purity of their food.



Chakras for reference



Dvadasha Lingatobhadra chakra



XV. Parikrama

According to the scriptures, performing parikrama of a deity, yajna or anything with religious significance helps to nullify sins. During the course of this Yajna, it was seen that at any time of the day or night there was always someone doing parikrama of the yajnashala. Many set aside a specific time for parikrama while others did it as and when they could, in between chores and responsibilities. The kachcha parikrama path around the yajnashala was given a fresh coating of a mixture of mud and cow dung every day.

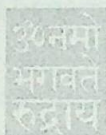
Ma said that the aim must be to do a hundred and eight rounds spread over the eleven days, or even that number everyday. However, one round everyday was the minimum number for everyone. She laid down certain rules to be observed while doing parikrama: (1) Keep silent. (2) Keep hands folded. (3) Do japa throughout. (4) Pace and posture



must be as if one is carrying a pot of water on one's head.
(5) Do not touch anyone or be touched while walking.

Ma's foreign devotees asked Her when they should do parikrama. So Ma set a timetable for everyone. In the early morning, before the pandits arrived, the people who worked in the yajnishala did parikrama. After the pandits arrived, it was the turn of the devotees. At night, the boys of the Ashram who worked as volunteers for the Yajna did parikrama. Br. Nirvananada asked them to keep up the parikrama all night. He said that he would join them around 3 a.m. This also served as protection for the yajnishala. On hearing this, many others also decided to do parikrama at night. Ma's foreign devotees also did parikrama at night. It was seen that even after the Yajna had ended, many continued to come and do parikrama of the yajnishala.





XVI. Rain

Clouds that are produced by the smoke of a well-conducted yajna are beneficial. On the first day of the Yajna itself, the sky became cloudy towards the afternoon and it started to pour. Rain, or at least cloudy weather, was seen on most days of the Yajna. On one occasion, it rained at the same time on three consecutive days. Ma said that Shiva and Parvati had come with their family.

On Ma's suggestion, the straw roof of the yajnashala was made leakproof by tying large plastic sheets over it. Even so, water leaked into the yajnashala as strong winds blew away some of the plastic sheets. People were not allowed to climb onto the roof because the Yajna was in progress and so it was a hard task to retie the sheets from the sides. Rain also came in through the walls of the yajnashala, which were mostly made of sheets of broad iron mesh. The rain made puddles and wet the things



inside the mandap. Water that had collected had to be removed, and Brni. Purnananda and others often found themselves with the difficult task of drying the mandap overnight for the next morning's session. Br. Nirvanan da helped them in this task. Water also collected on the parikrama path and a hole had to be made in the boundary wall near the canal so it could flow out. Strangely, it was found that it rained only on and around the yajnashala.

There is a tea stall just opposite the Ashram. Its owner gets a good view of people entering and leaving the Ashram. During the Yajna, he began to associate Pt. Vamadeva with rain. Whenever he saw the acharya walking towards the Ashram he would predict, "It is going to rain now!"

Ma had asked for tin sheets to be hung high above each kunda. This was to prevent any danger to the straw roof from the flames and sparks of the fires of the havan. These sheets also served to prevent rain from falling into the fire. It is said that even one drop of water falling into the flames can destroy the efficacy of a Yajna.

One day Ma was in the back verandah of Her residence, Matri Nivas, getting some vegetables sorted out. The yajnashala was visible from the windows of the verandah. Brni. Purnananda requested Ma to turn Her gaze towards the yajnashala. She was sure that if Ma took even one look at it, the Yajna would proceed without any problem. Ma did not refuse and neither did She look up but, smiling to Herself, continued with what She was doing. Brni. Purnananda requested Ma a few more times but without success.



Later that evening there was a huge thunderstorm. Torrential rain and fierce winds lashed the yajnashala. The electricity failed and the lights and loudspeaker system went off. There was thunder and lightning. As the storm grew louder, the voices of the ritviks chanting "Svaha!" also grew louder. It was as if each was trying to outdo the other!

Ma, who was in Her room at the time, was informed. She came outside and the rain started subsiding. Something similar had been observed on other occasions too. If someone complained about the rain to Ma and She stepped out, some drops would fall on Her and the rain would stop. Now Ma said, "Rudra Bhagavan has shown his Rudra form." Brni. Purnananda thinks that maybe if Ma had glanced at the yajnashala, the fierce thunderstorm, symbolic of Rudra, may not have occurred.

Brni. Purnananda says that when the storm was over and she looked up at the sky, she saw a stunning sight. The sky was aglow with striking colours - orange, pink, gold, rust and yellow. The others present also looked at the sky in wonder. Moreover, this spectacle was seen directly above the yajnashala. Brni. Purnananda says she had never before, or has since, seen such a beautiful sight.





XVII. The Rituals

The rituals commenced on the 5th and concluded on the 16th of May. On the 5th, the rituals that were to be conducted prior to entering the yajnashala, the central arena of the Yajna, took place. The Jala Yatra, a procession to the Ganga, took place on the next day, the 6th, when several kalashas were ritually filled, consecrated and brought back. After this, the pandits formally entered the yajnashala and sanctified the mandap through various rituals. On the 7th, Agni was invoked and was placed in the kundas. The devatas who were to be worshipped during the Yajna were invited to take their place on the vedis, which were to be their abode until the end of the Yajna. These devatas were worshipped and, since Agni devata had been established, havan commenced at each kunda. Worship of the devatas and havan were performed henceforth everyday, from the 8th to the 15th. Ceremonies,



which marked the conclusion of the Yajna, took place on the 16th of May. The devatas were bid farewell and there was a procession to the Ganga. Certain ceremonies were performed on the banks of the Ganga and everyone took a ritual bath. Later, the ritviks were presented with dakshina and given a ritual feast.

5th May: Sarvaprashchit, Dasha Mahadana

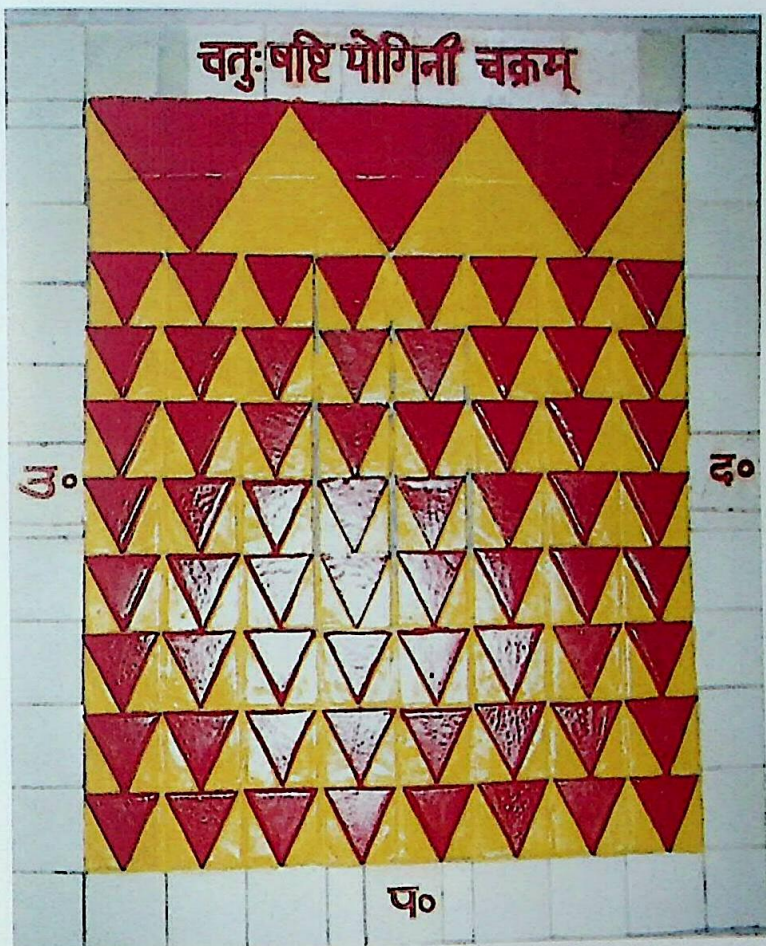
Knowingly or unknowingly, one commits many sins everyday. For this reason, the yajman does a ritual repentance (prashchit) before he is pure enough to perform a yajna. Br. Bhaskarananda was the yajman in this Yajna. In the beginning, Br. Purnananda was asked to be the yajman but she declined. She felt that both to be yajman and to take care of the arrangements would not be feasible. Pt. Vamadeva conducted the Sarvaprashchit ceremony for Br. Bhaskarananda on the banks of the Ganga.

As part of this ceremony, Dasha Mahadana, or gift of ten things (barley, land, gold, silver, ghee, sesame, clothes, rice, jaggery and salt), was given to Pt. Vamadeva. It took place under the banyan tree that stood where Ma's Temple is now constructed. In this ceremony it so happened that the quantity of salt was quite large. When Ma saw it, She was amused and laughed. She said that anything that is given should be in the proper proportion.

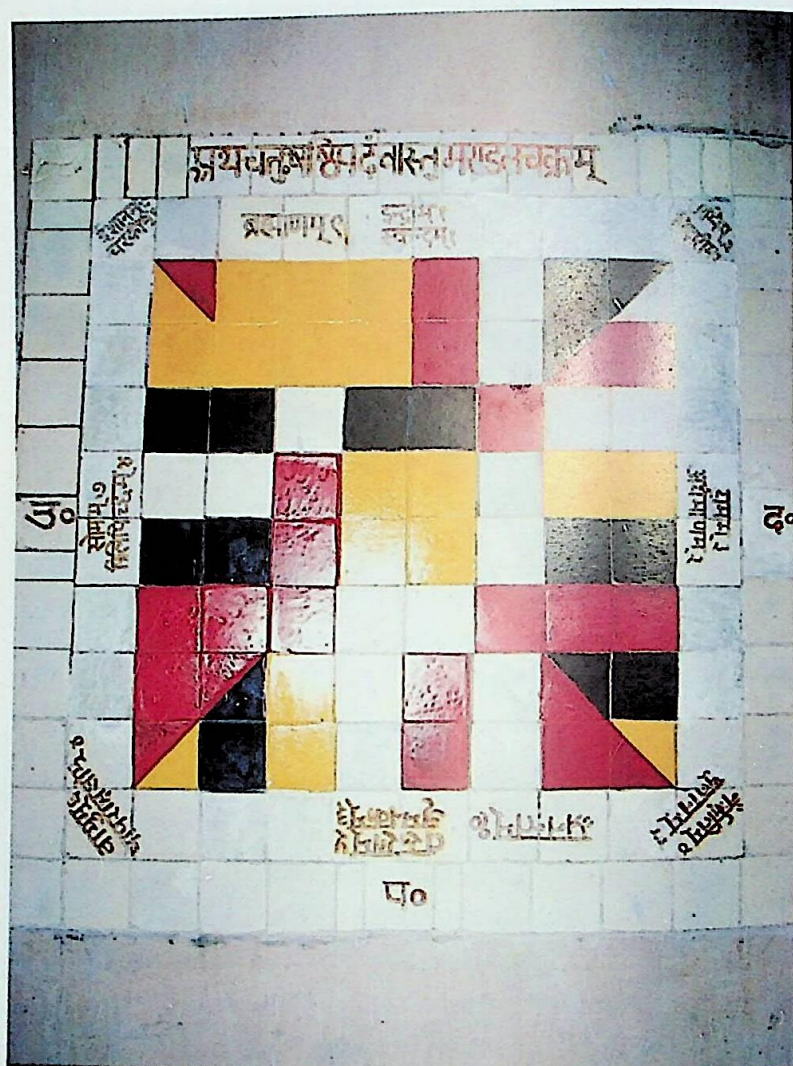
6th May: Jala Yatra, Purvanga Puja, Varan, Mandap Pravesha, Mandap Proksha, Vastu Puja, Mandap Puja

At dawn on the 6th of May, Shuklapaksha Tritiya of Vaishakh, and also Akshay Tritiya, Km. Chhabi Banerjee (a famous singer from Kolkata and a devotee) led devotees





Chatuhsashti Yogini chakra



Vastu chakra

in Usha Kirtan⁷⁵ around the yajñashala. The main rituals commenced today.

Water has great significance in all rituals of karmakanda. It is used while taking the sankalpa and also for the purification of the persons performing the ceremonies and the articles used therein. A kalasha filled with water is also ritually consecrated at the start of most rituals. Varuna, the devata of water, is invoked into this kalasha. The water, thus consecrated in the kalasha, performs several functions. Whereas Agni transports the oblations in the kundas to the devatas, Varuna transports the bhakti generated within the worshipper during the performance of the rituals to the devatas. Varuna is the keeper of the cosmic law and, by being duly worshipped, provides protection against any inadvertent error in ritual activities.⁷⁶ Further, the watery element has the quality of providing satisfaction (tripti) and thus plays its part in pleasing the devatas. Being such an essential ingredient of a yajña, it is desirable to bring water for the rituals from as pure a source as possible. The Jala Yatra is the journey to such a water source.

⁷⁵ Usha Kirtan is a group of prayers and bhajans that are supposed to be sung every dawn in all of Ma's Ashrams.

⁷⁶ Rigveda 1.25.1-2: *yacciddhi te viśo yathā pra deva varuṇa vratam | minīmasi dyavidyavi | | mā vadhāya hatnave jihilānasya riradhaḥ | mā hīṇānasya manyave | |* (O God! O Varuna! Whichever of your laws we, as men, violate day after day - give us not as prey to death to be destroyed by you in wrath, to your fierce anger when you are displeased.) Rigveda 7.89.5: *yat kiṁ cedam varuṇa daivye jane 'bhidroham manuṣyāścaramasi | acitti yat tava dharmo yuyopima mā nastasmādenaso deva ririṣaḥ | |* (O Varuna! Whatever may be the offence which we as men commit against heavenly beings, O God! when thoughtlessly we violate your laws, do not punish us for that offence.)



For the Atirudra Mahayajna the Jala Yatra went to the nearby Daksheshwar Ghat (near the Daksheshwar Temple) of the Ganga. A few brahmacharis, chosen by Ma, carried nine empty kalashas to the Ghat. The procession was accompanied by music and kirtan. Each kalasha was decorated with new cloth, fresh twigs with leaves from five kinds of trees⁷⁷, svastika and garland. Pujas were performed on the bank and the kalashas were filled with water to the chanting of mantras. Flowers, scent, unhusked rice, durva grass and other auspicious things were added to the kalashas. One of these kalashas was going to be the main kalasha, and Varuna was invoked into it. Waters from all tirthas (holy places) was invoked into this kalasha, thus making it a symbol of the Brahmanda, or the universe. The kalasha was also made to represent the five tattvas by adding certain things into its water. Prithvi was represented by the seven types of soil, jala by the water itself, Agni by precious and semi-precious stones, the element vayu is present everywhere and akasha was represented by the space left empty at the top. Some water from this main kalasha was added to the other eight kalashas too.

After the ceremonies on the bank of the Ganga were over, the procession returned with the filled kalashas. As it reached the gates of the Yajna premises, an elephant was seen walking down the road. This was considered a very good omen.

The main kalasha into which Varuna was invoked was placed on the main vedi. The other eight kalashas were

⁷⁷ The panchapallava, or five kinds of leaves, used are those of the pipal, gular, pilkhan, bargad (all species of Ficus) and mango trees.



placed near the western door of the mandap. Water from them was added to a few other kalashas that were not taken out in the Jala Yatra, but which would be placed at other places in the mandap, like those at the doors and on the other vedis. The water that remained was used to water the barley seeds planted around the yajnishala.

Purvanga Pujan consisted of a group of pujas performed prior to entering the mandap, and included **Panchanga Puja**n, **Punyahvachan** and **Ayushya Mantra Japa**. The pujas consisted of the worship of: (a) Ganesha and Ambika, (b) Varuna, (c) Shodasha Matrika, (d) Saptaghritha Matrika and (e) the Naandi Mukha Shraddh ritual. Ganesha is the lord of hosts, or groups, and is worshipped so that no obstruction is experienced from any group during the function, either on the gross or on the subtle level. Ganesha desired that his mother be worshipped along with him; thus, he and Ambika are worshipped together. Varuna, who had previously been invoked into the main kalasha, was also worshipped. Shodasha Matrika, the sixteen mother goddesses, with Gauri as the main goddess, were worshipped. These goddesses confer on the worshippers the right to perform the Yajna. The Saptaghritha Matrika, another group of mother goddesses, were worshipped in order to keep the intellect (buddhi) of the worshippers in a state of sattva, and to increase the auspiciousness of the function. Naandi Mukha Shraddh was performed for the satisfaction of the ancestors of the yajman. Pleased with the offerings of the Shraddh, the ancestors confer blessings on the yajman that aid in the successful completion of the function. The Shraddh also keeps the yajman in a state of purity to complete the function in case there is any mishap



because of which he is considered unfit (under sutak) to continue as yajman. Articles used for the Shraddh are not brought into the mandap but are given away to an appropriate recipient outside.

Punyahvachan is the recitation of svastivachan. Since pandits of all four Vedas were present here, mantras from all Vedas were recited. Ayushya Mantra Japa, for the longevity of the yajman, was also performed.

Varan took place after the Purvanga Pujan. In this ceremony, the ritviks were assigned their duties. They assembled outside, to the south of the yajnashala. Ma was present, as were invited mahatmas, and other guests and devotees.

The pandits were first formally invited. After they had washed their feet, they were taken to their asanas and worshipped. Then they were presented with Varan, or gifts, and were requested to take up various duties during the ceremonies in the mandap. They accepted the gifts as a token of their agreement. Varan for each pandit included two silk dhoti-chadar sets, a namavali, a pair of paduka, an asana, a silver ring, lota, panchapaatra, japamala and bag, kusha asana, an angochha, a rudraksha mala, book of the Rudri paatha, sacred thread, madhupark and dakshina. Madhupark is a very special offering. It is a mixture of honey, ghee and curd, served in a vessel made of kansa metal. A puja was also performed on Ma and the pandits chanted Vedic mantras.

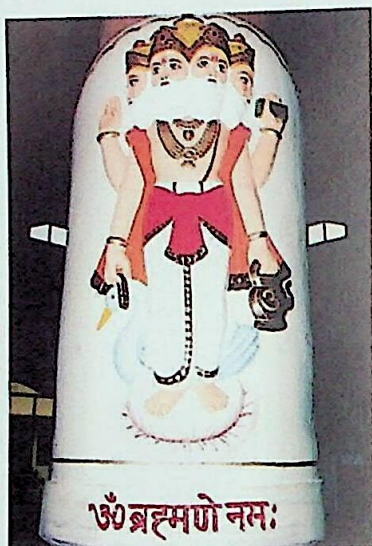
The acharya had earlier decided on the role of each pandit, but it was the yajman who carried out the formalities. The acharya was formally chosen first. Then





Kshetrapala chakra

Devatas of the four central pillars



Brahma



Vishnu



Shambhu



Indra

the kundacharyas, brahmas, hotas, dvarpalas, jaapaka, sadasya and paricharaka were chosen. Pt. Vamadeva noticed that the pandit who was to be the sarvopadrashtha had not arrived. So it was decided to request Ma to be the sarvopadrashtha and Varan was presented to Her.

After this ceremony, the pandits and the yajman, carrying the devatas who had been worshipped in the Panchanga Pujan, performed a parikrama of the yajnashala. The yajman trickled a mixture of water and milk in a narrow bed of mud along the outside walls of the yajnashala, while barley seeds were dropped onto the mud. The sprouting of seeds is considered an auspicious omen and barley is chosen because it sprouts quickly in all seasons. Thus, by the time the main puja started the next day, the barley seeds had already sprouted.

Now the acharya, pandits and yajman, still carrying the devatas, entered the yajnashala through the western door. This entry was the **Mandap Pravesh**. First the acharya and then the yajman entered the mandap, each with their right foot. Pujas of the chaukhat (door frame) and yajna bhumi (ground within the yajnashala) were performed. A coconut was broken for **Nariyal Bali**. The devatas who were worshipped in the Purvanga Pujan, the mother goddesses and Ganesha, were placed on the Matrika vedi.

Purification of the mandap, called **Mandap Prokshan**, now took place. The yajnashala was ritually purified inside with water and milk. As a part of this, the acharya also performed the **Dikrakshan**. This is a ritual to block the entry of unwanted elements from all directions. He sprinkled yellow mustard seeds, Gangajala and



om namo bhagavate rudrāya

panchagavya around the mandap and chanted mantras. This was to prevent the entry of rakshasas who could take away the fruits of the yajna as well as to prevent any other obstruction. Rakshasas are demonic beings who forcefully take anything that may not rightfully be theirs. Thus, they are not welcome at any puja or ritual. For further protection, a long length of thick cotton thread was tied around the yajnashala outside. The thread had specially been ordered for this purpose so that it was a single piece without any knots or joints. The tying of the protective thread is called **Veshtan**. **Vastu Puja**n was performed on the Vastu vedi to propitiate the Vastudevata of the mandap.

Mandap Pujan was performed, in which devatas of the pillars, doors and toranas were invited to take up their respective places, and were then worshipped. The Dashadikpalas were invoked onto their vedis and were worshipped. The **Shikhar Puja**n was also performed in which a kalasha was established on the highest point outside, on the roof. Rudra, the main deity of the Yajna, was invoked into this kalasha. Anyone who could not enter the Yajna premises could have darshan of this kalasha, this darshan being equivalent to a darshan of the Yajna taking place inside. The mahadhvaja was worshipped. The morning session ended with a small puja of the devatas who had been invited and were present within the mandap, arati and pushpanjali.

A sankalpa is taken by anyone who wishes to perform a ritual like a charity, vrata, yajna and so on, before the pujas commence. Such rituals, like all other actions, are performed with a certain aim. A sankalpa is a statement of this aim. A sankalpa also identifies the person carrying



out the ritual, the point in time at which the ritual is taking place and its geographical location. It is said that any ritual performed without a sankalpa yields only meagre results. A Sankalpa was taken by Br. Bhaskarananda, the yajman, before the main puja and havan of the Atirudra Mahayajna commenced.⁷⁸ Smaller sankalpas were taken in front of the smaller vedis. Separate sankalpas had also been taken earlier before each of the preparatory pujas, like the Panchanga Puja and the Naandi Mukha Shraddh.

7th May: Pradhan Puja, Navagraha Puja, Yogini Puja, Kshetrapala Puja, Panchabhu Sanskara, Arani Manthan, Agni Sthapana, Kushkandika Vidhan, Graha Havan, Agharajya Homa, Mahanyas, Havan

The following pujas took place on the 7th of May, after the devatas were invited to take their places on their respective vedis: **Pradhan Puja, Navagraha Puja, Yogini Puja and Kshetrapala Puja**. The devatas of the two other vedis, the Matrika vedi and the Vastu vedi, had already been installed on the previous day, and pujas of the devatas on these two vedis was also performed today. As is customary, devatas on all the vedis were worshipped everyday. However, today, which was the first day with devatas present on all six vedis, there was a special puja of the Pradhan (main) vedi. This special puja was repeated on the last day of the Yajna.

All eleven kundas were now prepared to receive Agni devata. For this, they were cleaned and all dirt, living or dead creatures and other impurities were removed. The

⁷⁸ The main sankalpa is given later in this book.



cleaning ritual consisted of five individual activities, collectively called **Panchabhu Sanskara**. As part of this cleaning process, the floor of each kunda was cleaned using kusha, gomaya (cow dung mixed with Gangajala), Gangajala and so on. It was done for the sake of cleanliness and to prevent the killing of creatures. After this ritual, no sin is incurred even if some creatures are killed.

Arani Manthan, a ritual in which Agni was made manifest, took place at a muhurat chosen by the acharya. The Manthan (churning) took place in the two-part device called the arani. To begin with, a puja of the arani was performed. A deerskin was placed on the ground over which a blanket, and then an asana, were spread. The arani was placed on this asana and a red-bordered silk sari was placed on the arani. The sari was symbolic of Svaha, the wife of Agni. After the puja was completed, the acharya held the rod of the arani down while the yajman pulled the rope to rotate it in the cradle. Later, since the process can be quite exhausting for just one person to complete, a younger ritvik helped out.

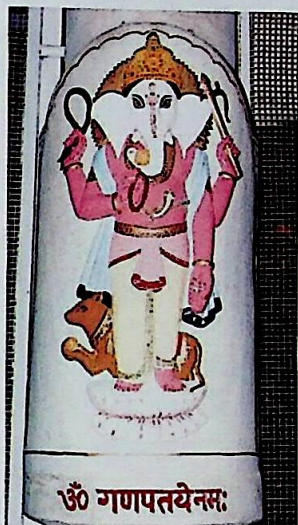
It is said that if there exists any kind of impurity in the process, Agni devata does not manifest quickly. On this occasion however, the sparks appeared quite easily. They were collected on cotton wool placed on cow dung cakes and coconut fibre, on a plate made of kansa metal. The acharya blew on the sparks thus collected, to strengthen them. The blowing was done through a hollow pipe to prevent saliva from falling into the sparks. Since Agni is considered the mouth of the devatas, it should never be fanned with anything like one's hand or with paper. The new-born Agni was blessed by Ma before being carefully



Devatas of the other main pillars, situated along the walls



Surya



Ganapati



Yama



Nagaraja



Skanda



Vayu



Soma



Varuna

taken to the main kunda and being placed there in the aagneyakona, in a ritual called **Agni Sthapana**. Agni in this main kunda was strengthened by placing more cow dung cakes and, later, adding pieces of wood and ghee to it. Agni from this main kunda was transferred to each of the other ten kundas too. Burning pieces, retrieved from the bottom of the main kunda with a large, long-handled ladle, were placed on several plates filled with cow dung cakes and carried to the other kundas. They were placed in the aagneyakona of each, thus establishing Agni in the remaining ten kundas. Larger sticks of wood were added to the kundas gradually, and soon Agni had grown from a few sparks to bright and blazing tongues of flame in each of the eleven kundas. It is always a smokeless and vigorous fire into which the ahutis are offered.

Agni Sthapana was accompanied by the chanting of Vedic mantras, blowing of conches and kirtan. Devotees and visitors eagerly watched the proceedings from outside the yajrashala.

The **Kushkandika Vidhan** was also performed. This is a group of rituals wherein the kunda and the yajna paatra are sanctified, Agni devata is made ready to receive the oblations, and in which Charu is cooked. Charu is a preparation of rice, milk and unrefined powdered sugar. Kushkandika Vidhan also included, as an essential requirement, several pieces of kusha grass. As mentioned earlier, kusha is very important in rituals.

Charu was cooked, on the first and last day, in a special vessel hung above the fire of each kunda. Some of the charu cooked on the first day was offered as ahuti. Some of it was also mixed with shakalya and offered as ahuti for the



om namo bhagavate rudrāya

Graha Havan. Graha Havan was performed for the appeasement of the nine planets and was performed in each kunda. Some of the charu cooked on the last day was used as ahuti and the rest was given as prasad to the yajman and others.

Then the **Agharajya Homa** was performed. In this ritual four ahutis of ghee were offered, one each for Prajapati, Indra, Agni and Soma.

Mahanyas was now performed by the yajman and the ritviks. This was repeated every day before the commencement of the day's ceremonies. Nyas is a process whereby the body and mind of the worshipper are sanctified and protected. Various parts of the body, like the eyes, ears, head, shoulders and so on, are sanctified with mantras and divine powers are thus imbued in them. The worshipper is thereby raised to a level where he is worthy enough to carry out the worship of the devatas. Mahanyas, which was performed now, is more elaborate than nyas, because many more parts are thus purified than are done for just nyas. It is important to sanctify oneself in this manner to prevent the fruits of the ceremonies being taken away by unwanted entities.

Once the rituals of cleansing and sanctification were complete, and Agni devata was ready and waiting to receive oblations, the yajman formally requested the acharya and ritviks to commence the havan. **Havan** started simultaneously in all eleven kundas with the first mantras of the Rudra Ashtadhyayi. This was the core ritual of the Atirudra Mahayajna: an ancient, grand and complex worship of Rudra.



The morning session of pujas and havan was from 7 a.m. - 12 noon everyday. There was a half-hour break for rest and refreshments from 9 a.m. - 9.30 a.m. The afternoon session was from 3 p.m. - 6 p.m. These timings continued for the entire duration of the Yajna.

8th - 15th May: Havan

Shakalya was offered into the fire during havan. As mentioned earlier, shakalya used in this Yajna was a mixture of black sesame, rice, barley, cow's ghee and shakkar. The ingredients were mixed in the following proportions - $1:1/2:1/4:1/8$ and again $1/8$ respectively. To this mixture was added, in no particular proportion, sandalwood powder, makhana (gorgon nut), panchameva (a mix of five kinds of dry fruits), kamal gatta (lotus seeds), guggal (mukul myrrh) and baelgiri (a product of the bael tree). All these ingredients had earlier been thoroughly cleaned so that no insects, stones or other impurities were present.

Since all pujas are performed for increasing one's sattva, every effort should be to make offerings to strengthen devatas who represent sattva. If the devatas are strengthened, the rakshasas are automatically weakened. This principle holds good in karmakanda and is also reflected in the psyche of those performing the karma. Shakalya was offered for the devatas and thus every effort was made to see that the entire havi fell into the fire or, at least, on the topmost step of the kunda. The topmost step represents sattva and so the shakalya, which falls on it, can be offered to Agni again. However, that which falls on the lower two steps, representing rajas and tamas, cannot be offered to Agni; it is the rakshasas who take it.



Shakalya was offered in the mrigi mudra (deer mudra) which employs the tip of the thumb, and that of the middle and ring fingers. The tips of these fingers, corresponding to the eastern portion of the hand, represent sattva guna.

By the end of the last session of the Atirudra Mahayajna, which was on the evening of the 15th of May, the required 2,419,758 ahutis had been offered to the chanting of the Rudra Ashtadhyayi. The quantities of materials that were offered to Agni in all the kundas taken together were: 35 maunds (approximately 1306 kg) of black sesame, 17.5 maunds (approximately 653 kg) of rice, 8.75 maunds (approximately 326 kg) of barley, 5 maunds (approximately 186 kg) of sugar, 23 large tins of ghee (each holding approximately 15 kg), 4 seers (approximately 3.75 kg) of kamal gatta, 5 seers (approximately 4.65 kg) of sandalwood powder, 3 seers (approximately 2.75 kg) of guggal, 5 seers (approximately 4.65 kg) of panchameva, 1 seer of bhojpatra (932 g) and 100 maunds (approximately 3720 kg) of wood.

The havan and accompanying pujas continued until the end of the Yajna. Every morning, after Mandap Pujan, Mahanyas, sankalpa and other preparatory requirements, havan commenced and continued in the afternoon session as well. The devatas, of course, resided day and night in their respective places in the mandap - on the vedis, in the doors, pillars and so on, with Agni devata blazing in all eleven kundas. Shodashopachara⁷⁹ puja of the idols of Shiva and His family were performed only on the first and last day. On the other days, these pujas were performed

⁷⁹ This is a group of rituals that involves sixteen steps of worship, including welcoming the deity, bathing, feeding, performing arati and so on.

on Narmadeshvara, and an abbreviated version was performed on the idols. Puja was performed for the other devatas on the other vedis daily in the morning. Arati was performed for all the devatas, morning and evening. Pushpanjali took place at the end of the evening session and Shantijala was sprinkled on those inside the mandap. Arati and prasad were given to all, inside and outside.

After the worship of the devatas every morning, the yajman worshipped the ritviks in the brahmin puja ritual. An abbreviated version of the Varan was performed everyday before the havan took place. At the end of the day, a token dakshina was given to each ritvik. These (varan and dakshina) were done so that if, for any reason (ill-health, personal emergency etc.) a ritvik could not come the next day, he would not go without dakshina, and his substitute would be able to join the next morning with a proper invitation, or varan. It so happened one day that a ritvik could not return after lunch for the afternoon session. Pt. Vamadeva was in a dilemma, since a brahmin who had not taken Varan in the morning could not participate in the havan. He apprised Ma of the situation and She said that a paricharaka should take the missing ritvik's place.

For practical reasons the idols of Shiva and His family, placed in the silver simhasana on the pradhan kalasha on the Pradhan vedi, could not be disturbed for certain rituals. Hence, the Narmadeshvara Shivalinga, also placed on the Lingatobhadra chakra, was worshipped instead. Special puja, abhisheka⁸⁰ and Sahasrarchana (with Shiva

⁸⁰ A ritual anointing with certain liquids like water, ghee, milk, honey and so on.



Sahasranama - a prayer listing a thousand names of Shiva) were performed on Narmadeshvara everyday. The Sahasrarchana was performed everyday, from the 7th to 15th. One thousand and eight of each of the following were used for archana on different days: flowers, bael patra, cloth in the form of handkerchiefs, fruit, batashas, agarbattis and lighted ghee diyas. Five kilograms of rice and roli were also used. All items were later distributed as prasad.

The atmosphere, within and without: The havan progressed everyday with a chorus of mantras accompanying each ahuti in all eleven kundas. All eleven pandits at each kunda chanted each mantra in unison, as loudly and as clearly as they could, with the final "Svaha!" Along with these chants, the yajnashala resounded with the crackling of Agni devata as He graciously accepted the oblations, the four types of Veda paatha and the Shiva Purana paatha. Only the gaanapatya and the jaapaka said their mantras silently. The parcicharak and the sadasya, as well as the brahmacharinis were on their toes throughout, attending to the innumerable tasks that needed to be carried out while the rituals were in progress. Ma's cot, on which She sat inside the mandap, was placed along the northern wall, near the Pradhan vedi. Ma came everyday to the mandap at least once, sometimes more than once, and witnessed the proceedings inside.

The devotees filed passed silently, hands folded, doing as many parikramas as they could. Pandals (open tents) were set up near the yajnashala. One section of this covered area was meant for the sadhus who sat on the wooden cots set up for them. Devotees and visitors sat on the other



side. People were seen doing their individual japa and paatha, soaking in the charged atmosphere around the yajnashala, avoiding worldly conversation as far as possible. Pt. Vamadeva had earlier mentioned the way in which all devotees could participate in a yajna. He had said that they should have darshan of the rising flames, listen to the mantras and perform parikramas. Kripalji saw to it that there was no litter around the yajnashala, and that the mud ground was kept clean. It was as if the purity and cleanliness from inside the yajnashala had spilled over to the outside.

16th May: Uttaranga Pujan, Svishtikrit Homa, Navahuti, Dashadikpala Bali, Kshetrapala Bali, Purnahuti, Vasordhara, Purnapaatra Dana, Brahmin Dakshina, Shaiyya Dana, Svatanttra Godana, Deva Visarjana, Shreyodana, Shobha Yatra, Avabhrit Snana, Trayush, Brahmin Bhojana and Dakshina

After the required number of ahutis was over, a havan with Shiva Sahasranama and a havan for the other devatas (other than Rudra) were also performed. Then the Uttaranga group of pujas, which marked the conclusion of the Yajna, took place. It included worship of avaidh devatas, or devatas who were not formally invited, worship of Agni as Mridaagni, and worship of the Pradhan vedi.

Even though havan had continued for nine days, there was still some shakalya that remained. This remainder was offered all at once to Agni in a ceremony called the Svishtikrit Homa. This was followed by Navahuti, or offerings for the nine planets.

Dashadikpala Bali and Kshetrapala Bali were performed now. In these rituals, khichadi, papad and a

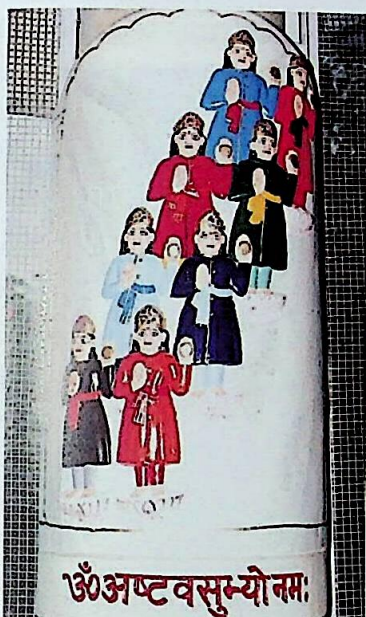


few other such items were offered to the guardians of the ten directions, and to the devata of the area in which the Yajna took place, as thanksgiving to them for not causing any obstruction during the process of the Yajna, and thus allowing it to reach a successful conclusion. Bali is that which is offered directly to the devata, i.e. not via the agency of Agni.

Then the **Purnahuti**, or the ahuti offered by the shruchi, the tip of which is called purna, was conducted. At each kunda, a dry coconut filled with ghee, covered with red cloth, tied with mouli (special red and yellow cotton thread), decorated with a garland, and placed on the shruchi, was offered to Agni. Purnahuti is offered to effect the completion of the Uttaranga Pujan. After the Purnahuti, ghee was poured in a continuous stream into each kunda, via a channel made of banana stems propped up over the kunda. This is called **Vasordhara**. Until now, things were being offered for other devatas, but these oblations were offered for the satisfaction of Agni Himself.

A filled purnapaatra, a vessel that can hold exactly two hundred and fifty six fistfuls of rice (approximately 16 kg), was given, as is customary, to the brahma of each kunda. This ceremony is known as the **Purnapaatra Dana**. On the rice were placed betel nut leaves, betel nuts, bananas (with the stem intact) and dakshina.

Then the **Brahmin Dakshina** took place in which all ritviks were given dakshina. This included Rs. 1201 for the main brahma, Rs. 1001 for each of the eleven kundacharyas, the eleven brahmas, the eight dvarapalas, the sadasya and the gaanapatya. The ninety nine hotas and eleven paricharakas received Rs. 301 each. The



Ashtavasu



Dhanada

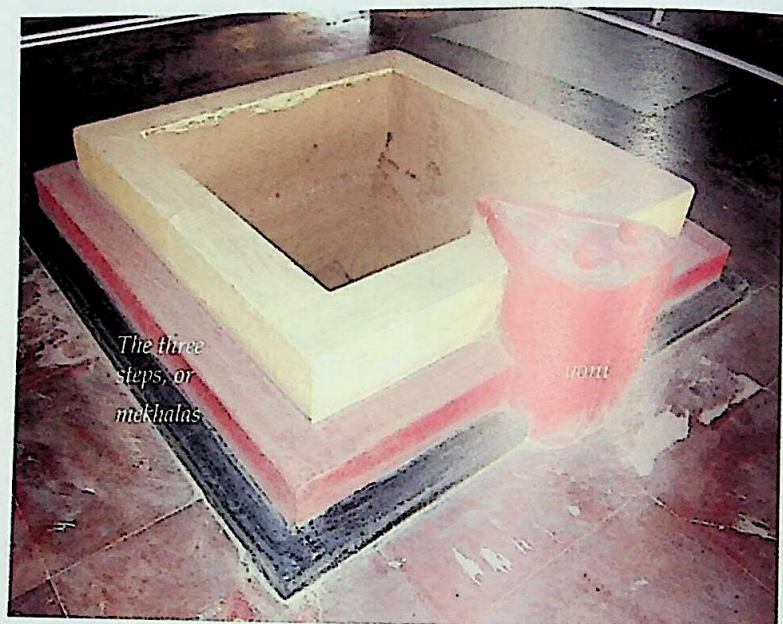


Brihaspati



Vishvakarma

Kunda and yajna paatra



Parts of a kunda



Interior of a kunda

acharya, Pt. Vamadeva, received Rs. 2001. (According to the rules, the main acharya gets double the dakshina of a kundacharya. Interestingly, this fact was not known when the sum was decided upon.) The Shiva Purana paathaka received Rs. 1001 and the jaapaka received Rs. 301.

Special gifts were made to Shiva and Parvati during the **Shaiyya Dana**. Shaiyya Dana includes a full range of clothing, household articles and supplies, and things required for daily use. The things that were given at the Shaiyya Dana at the end of this Yajna were: a large bed, a dari, a mattress, a mosquito net, a bed sheet and a quilt, a blanket, two pillows, a dhoti and silk chadar, a shirt, a coat, a pagadi, a shawl, an umbrella, a walking stick, a pair of shoes, a sari and blouse, a saubhagya pitari, a shringardan, a mirror, a ring and other gold and silver ornaments, books, vessels to cook in, an angithi (coal stove), coal, matches, a lantern, rice, pulses and other grains, vegetables and fruits, a trunk, a steel almirah, a table, a dressing table, and two sofa chairs.

According to custom all that remains in the mandap after a yajna is over, including the yajnashala itself, belongs to the acharya. Therefore, the things presented in the Shaiyya Dana were given to Pt. Vamadeva, after the Dana ritual had ended. He was also given all other supplies that were left over on the last day at the end of all the ceremonies. He was given a token amount of money as the cost of the structure of the yajnashala.

Then the ceremony of making a gift of cows to the acharya, the **Svatantra Godana**, was conducted. The cows that were given were bought, through Mahant Girdhar Narayan Puri of the Nirvani Akhada, especially for this



purpose from Punjab. Seven cows, each with a calf, were gifted to the acharya. Each cow was adorned with a beautiful red cloth, a copper back-piece, gilded horns, silver hoofs, pearls on its tail, and a bell around its neck. Money was given to cover the cost of their food for one year. In addition, vessels were provided for them to feed in, as well as those for milking them and for churning butter. Ma suggested that since Pt. Vamadeva would not be able to take the cows to Varanasi, they should be given by him to the Nirvani Akhada where they would be well looked after. Ma's suggestion was carried out.

Since the pujas were complete, the devatas who had been invited, were bid farewell. A request was also made to them to return, if such a need arose in the future. This ritual, the **Deva Visarjana** marked the end of the rituals within the yajnishala. The kalashas and the vedis were now given to the acharya in a ritual called the **Sampradhan Peetha**. The **Abhisheka** of the yajman was performed in which he was sprinkled with water from the main kalasha. Since the devatas had been residing in this kalasha, its water is like prasad, and its sprinkling like a blessing.

The ritviks also performed **Shreyodana**, a ceremony in which the yajman is blessed by them for having invited them to conduct the yajna. Reciting mantras for his long life and prosperity, they sprinkled rice grains and other auspicious things on him.

Now the **Shobha Yatra** took place. This is a procession taken out after the completion of a yajna. It travels through the town to a water source where pujas are performed. People take a dip, known as **Avabhrith Snana**, in the



waters. As the Shobha Yatra returns, people visit temples on the way.

Initially, it seemed that since Ma was not keeping well, She would not be a part of this Yatra. In addition, it was decided that the Yatra would go only up to the nearby Daksheshwar Ghat. At 8.30 pm on the night of the 15th, Brni. Purnananda informed Ma about the Yatra and the Avabhrith Snana, which was to take place the next day, and expressed regret that Ma was not well. Brni. Purnananda implied that it might be too strenuous for Ma to participate in the Yatra. However, Ma's reaction showed that Ma would indeed take part and was just waiting to be informed! Before Brni. Purnananda could complete her sentence, Ma told her to ask Shri Ram Panjwani (a devotee) to make immediate arrangements for two open jeeps. One was for Herself and the other for the Shankaracharya of Dwarika. Ma also sent Brni. Purnananda to invite the Shankaracharya formally for the procession.

Shri S. K. Dutta was asked to contact the Bada Akhada for elephants, horses, staff-holders, a band and other ceremonial paraphernalia for the procession. It was no longer to be just a small procession going to the nearby river bank. This was a large procession with all the accompanying regalia, going up to Brahma Kunda in Haridwar. Ma remarked that it was after a long time, (the last being after the Akhanda Gayatri Yajna in Varanasi) that She was going for an Avabhrith Snana. The Shankaracharya had accepted the invitation to be in the Yatra, but had said that he would go only up to the Shankaracharya Chowk (in Kankhal) and then return, to be in time for the afternoon puja of his personal deities.



om namo bhagavate rudrāya

The procession started at 10 a.m. the next morning. Ma under a white umbrella; the Shankaracharya under his ceremonial umbrella accompanied by his followers; the acharya, the ritviks and scores of devotees; decorated elephants, horses and vehicles; the band playing mangal dhvani; and devotees doing kirtan and jaijaikar set out to Brahma Kunda in Haridwar. The akhadas had been invited and participated in the procession. Because of the huge crowd, the police was also present.

On the way to Brahma Kunda, the Shobha Yatra travelled through the towns of Kankhal and Haridwar. Several ashrams along the way wanted to honour and welcome Ma as the procession passed by. They stopped the procession in front of their ashrams and made offerings to Her of fruits, sweets, garlands, nakuldana and the like. This custom, of stopping a Shobha Yatra and offering presents, is known as 'Svagam'.

Once the Shobha Yatra reached Brahma Kunda, the waters of the kalashas, from which the devatas had departed, were poured into the Ganga. On the way to the Ganga, as well as on the return there was a light shower. Puja of the Ganga, organised by the Ganga Sabha, was performed. The Ganga Sabha is the organisation that carries out daily worship of the Ganga at Haridwar. The acharya performed Varuna Puja as thanksgiving for the successful completion of the Yajna. Twelve ahutis of ghee, accompanied by mantras, were offered into the Ganga. The yajman bathed with the water of the main kalasha. The kalasha was then refilled and brought back. The shakalya that had fallen on the ground in the mandap, and the nirmalya that had been collecting over the past ten days were put into the Ganga.





Yajna paatra

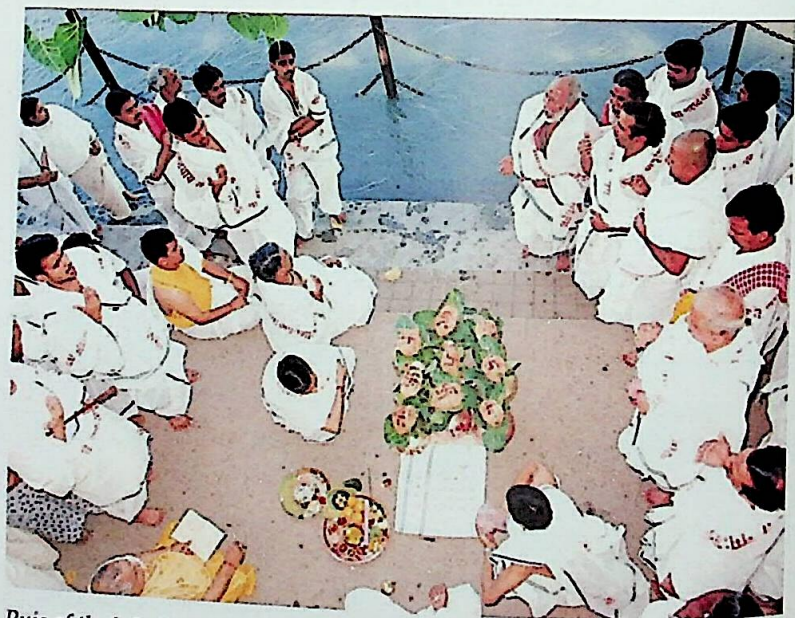
The Atirudra Mahayajna organised in 1996 on the occasion of Ma's Birth Centenary Celebrations



The decorated gate leading to the yajnashala



Pt. Vanadeva with other ritoiks on their way to the Ganga during the Jala Yatra



Puja of the kalashas on the banks of the Ganga

Then the acharya, the pandits and many others who had participated in or attended the Yajna, took a dip in the Ganga. This was the Avabhrith Snana that is performed at the end of every yajna. They also sipped some Gangajala in a ritual called Trayush. The Jala Yatra had marked the beginning of the Yajna; the Shobha Yatra and Avabhrith Snana marked its end. Because of Her indifferent health and the crowds, Ma did not go down to the Ganga but remained seated in the jeep. Gangajala was brought to Her in a vessel in which She dipped Her towel, thus making contact with the holy waters.

The Shobha Yatra now began its journey from Brahma Kunda back to the Ashram. It is customary to visit temples on the way back from an Avabhrith Snana. As this procession returned, Ma took Brni. Purnananda to the Daksheshwar Temple and performed a puja there.

Brahmin Bhojana took place when the procession returned to the Ashram. All the ritviks who had participated in the Yajna were served a special feast. They were honoured with sandalwood paste and garlands, and given a small sum as dakshina. Such dakshina is given to compensate for anything that was due but has inadvertently been left out.

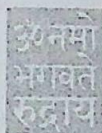
The grand, eleven-day function had formally concluded. However, an event like this is traditionally termed a success only when the pandits who have participated in it reach their homes safely. All the pandits *did* reach home safely, with memories that would last a lifetime. Many remarked at the time that they had never participated in a Yajna as perfect as this Atirudra Mahayajna had been. The pandits who we spoke with during the compilation of this book,



more than twenty-five years after the event, and who had participated in the Yajna, still hold the same view.

Now that the Yajna was over, the members of the Committee began to settle accounts and bring things to a conclusion. Devotees and visitors who had come from other places began to leave Kankhal. The yajnashala, which had been at the centre of everyone's focus for the last few days, looked calm and quiet. Fire no longer burned in the kundas though the embers remained hot for a couple of days. When they had cooled, the bhasma (ash) was removed, using large, long-handled spoons. Recalling Ma's words, the bhasma was eagerly collected by many as something very special.

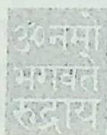




XVIII. The Trust

Ma sent a message to Shri Ram Panjwani to get the Atirudra Mahayajna Committee converted into a Trust. Ma also said, "See for how long it will continue." The Trust was formed but continued only for a few years, after which it was dissolved.





XIX. Permanent Construction

A few days after the Yajna ended, Ma left for Dehra Dun. The Committee members went to inform Her that they had completed all that had to be done after the conclusion of the Yajna. They found that they were left with a balance of twenty thousand rupees. Ma had earlier given this exact sum to them for a silver kalasha for the Pradhan vedi. Since the amount had not been utilized, the brahmacharinis wanted to return the money. However, Ma expressed Her kheyal that the temporary yajnashala be converted into a permanent structure and asked them to use the amount in its reconstruction. A temporary yajnashala, like the one in which this Yajna was conducted, is normally dismantled after the yajna is over. However, Ma wanted this yajnashala to be rebuilt so that it would last for "a thousand years" (Her words), and continue to be used for religious functions in the years to come.





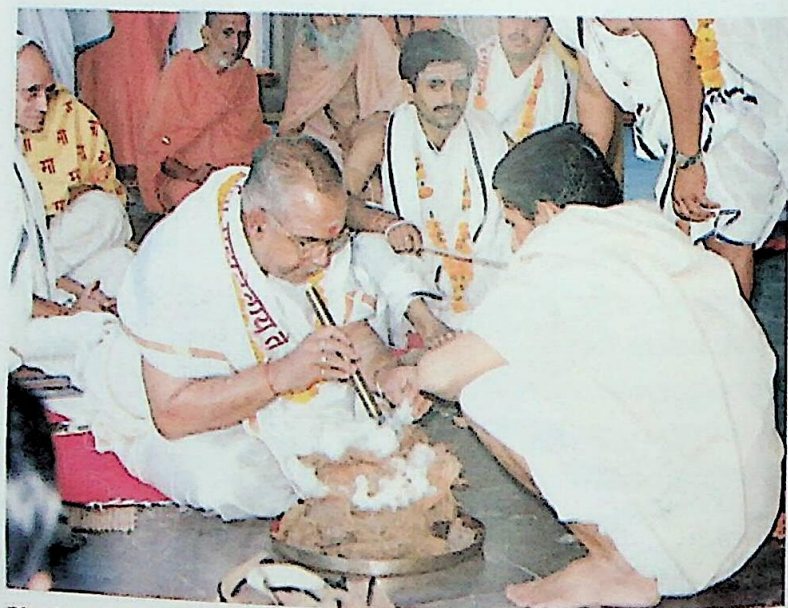
The yajnishala decorated for the occasion



Puja of the arani being performed by the yajman Br. Sanandan



Commencing the arani manthan



Blowing on the sparks...

Ma returned to Kankhal and called Nanha Mistry, the mason who had worked on the temporary yajñashala, to discuss its reconstruction. However, even after much bargaining, they could not reach an agreement⁸¹. Then Ma asked Brni. Purnananda to consult an architect, a contractor and a chartered accountant who were known to her for the construction of the permanent yajñashala. Thus, Shri A. P. Kanvinde of Delhi, one of India's leading architects at the time, was requested to take up the project. He immediately agreed and, later, even refused to charge anything for his services. Sardar Sadhu Singh was the contractor and Sardar Balhar Singh the carpenter for the building. Shri V. Ananthanarayanan, of Khanna and Annadhanam Chartered Accountants, New Delhi, was the chartered accountant for the project.

When the plan and model were being seen and approved, a devotee suggested that funds be collected for the construction through donations, and that Ma should make the first contribution. Km. Vasu (an ashramite) put forward Rs. 5 on Ma's behalf as Ma Herself never touched money.

A function was organised in Calcutta on the 7th of December 1983, by Km. Chhabi Banerjee and Km. Bishuddha Chakraborty, to raise funds for the construction. The famous dancer, Sanyukta Panigrahi, performed and various other artistes gave musical recitals. A sum of about five lakhs of rupees was collected at the

⁸¹ Ma was thus helping the brahmacharinis to carry out the task of the reconstruction of the Yajñashala. She wanted to initiate the process so that a budget could be prepared and funds collected.



function. The remainder of the funds came through donations.

During one of their discussions, Shri Kanvinde asked Ma why one Vedamurti had the face of a monkey. Ma replied, "Baba, you are asking, so this sharir is saying this. Atharvaveda has methods of maaran, uchchatan and so on. A monkey also jumps from here to there." Indicating others in the room, She continued, "If these people had asked, they would not have got a reply."⁸²

Ma wanted that the permanent structure also adhere strictly to the measurement and design codes laid down in the scriptures for such a building. As reference for future functions, the names and images of the devatas, and diagrams of chakras were to be given within the building itself. Shri Kanvinde prepared a plan and a model of the new yajñashala. Ma saw both plan and model, and approved of them. She also gave valuable suggestions and guidance. For example, the kundas, doors and toranas, at least in dimension and position, were to remain the same. According to the scriptures, these are the three most important features of a yajñashala. Bird-proofing was to be fitted. By Ma's specific instructions, there were to be no fans inside. Details of the shikhar and pataka were discussed, as were methods to protect the base of the structure from rain water. The path for parikrama was to be slightly detached from the yajñashala to preserve the sanctity of the rituals during their performance.

⁸² It was not necessary that every question put to Ma elicited a response. Ma responded to queries according to the sincerity and motive of the questioner. She often said, "As you play (this instrument), that is how (what) you will hear."



There was a chance that, with the new construction, a few things might have to be changed. For example, the position of the pillars with regard to the kundas had to be maintained, but it was possible that now some pillars might be shifted. Pt. Vamadeva suggested that arrows be used to indicate the position of the original pillars, in case the new pillars had to be built a few inches away. Eventually, there was no need for any changes at all. All the elements are as they were in the original, temporary yajñashala.

The kundas remain in the original, made of mud, and are in their original position, but now topped by a removable, perforated iron sheet. The sheet prevents dust from settling inside and protects the kundas. There is also a low railing around each kunda to prevent people from touching it so that its sanctity is preserved. Pt. Vamadeva had a diagrammatic chart made on the wall behind each vedi, showing the design and construction of its chakra.

Ma told Brni. Purnananda that She wanted the iron mesh, which was part of the wall on two sides of the Pradhan vedi to be covered, so that during future pujas the vedi would be protected from rain. Ma also wanted red stone to be used for the floor of the yajñashala. These changes were carried out during the reconstruction. Ma told Brni. Purnananda to see that the hibiscus tree, growing near the yajñashala, was not cut down. A short, brick skirting was therefore made around the tree to protect it. Ma also wanted an account of the expenditure of the Yajna to be maintained and all the details of the Yajna to be noted down carefully. She was very keen that a book be compiled on the Yajna. She also wanted the shikhar to be plated with gold. This last instruction has not been carried out so far.



After the Atirudra Mahayajna in May 1981, the following yajnas have been conducted in the permanent yajnasala. The first yajna organised by the Committee members in the permanent yajnasala was in May 1984, when its construction was completed. It was an abhishekatmak yajna. Pt. Vamadeva, was invited to be the acharya for this yajna too. He performed the abhisheka on a sphatik (crystal) Shivalinga with substances like fruit juices, milk, honey, ghee, milk and sugar. A havan was also performed as part of this yajna. The second yajna was organised by Brni. Purnananda in 1996, during Ma's Birth Centenary Celebrations. Pt. Vamadeva was again invited to be the acharya. This was an Atirudra Yajna, in which a hundred and five pandits took part. It was a havanatmak yajna. Sahasrarchana was also performed on a sphatik Shivalinga everyday with different things like fresh fruits, dry fruits, sweets, agarbatti and so on.

The third function, consisting of three small yajnas, was organised by Sw. Purnananda (she had taken sanyas by now) in April 1998, the year of the Purnakumbha Mela in Haridwar⁸³. A Vishnu Yajna, a Laghurudra Yajna and a Chandi Yajna were performed as part of this function. In the Vishnu Yajna and the Laghurudra Yajna, shakalya was used for ahuti. In the third, the Chandi Yajna, vegetables like spinach, bottle gourd and other green vegetables were offered as ahuti. Again, Pt. Vamadeva was the acharya. In 2004, a Maharudra Yajna was organised by Km. Aruna and Km. Nirmal, in which Pt. Gopal Sastry

⁸³ The Purnakumbha is held every three years in rotation at each of these places: Allahabad, Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain



was the acharya. In 2006, the Silver Jubilee year of the Atirudra Mahayajna, Sw. Purnananda organised a paathatmak Maharudra Yajna and a havanatmak Laghurudra Yajna. Pt. Ambarish Kala was the acharya.

The permanent yajnashala is still visited by many visitors and devotees. Having its darshan instills a feeling of reverence. The vibrations of the yajnas and the pujas that have taken place within it are still palpable. People are generally not allowed inside but one can have a glimpse of the interior by looking through the mesh walls. Many still do parikrama on the path along its periphery.

It is, indeed, a unique structure: the venue of a unique event. Just as the event, the Atirudra Mahayajna, had been permeated by Ma's grace and blessings, the structure, too, bears an imprint of Her divine inspiration. For many of us who are Her devotees, She is the embodiment of transcendent sweetness, love and perfection. She is, we believe, the Unmanifest and Ultimate Reality, who chose to incarnate on Earth and bless us in the form we are all familiar with - Shri Shri Anandamayee Ma.



List of things and materials used, and the dakshina given during the various pujas

5th May

For the Sarvaprayashchit ritual:

Godana nishkraya - Rs. 101 (a token amount symbolic of the dana of a cow)

Vrishdana nishkraya - Rs. 51 (a token amount symbolic of the dana of a bull)

Anuvadak puja - dhoti-chadar set and Rs. 21 (for the person who accepts the Sarvaprayaschit Dana)

Vishnu puja - Rs. 51 as dakshina to the acharya

Dasha Dana - items for this ritual are mentioned in the section entitled The Rituals / 5th May

6th May

Brahmin Puja (also called Kar Puja) - Rs. 70 (Rs. 2 for each of the following 35 ritviks: the pradhanacharya, the main brahma, 11 kundacharyas, 11 brahmas, 8 dvarapalas, 1 sadasya, 1 gaanapatya and 1 Shiva Purana paathaka.)

Abhisheka - Rs. 70 (as above)

Punyahvachan - Rs. 70 (as above)

Punyahvachan kalasha - Re. 1
Dhoti-chadar for
punyahvachan kalasha

Varan samagri - the items for this ritual are mentioned in the section entitled The Rituals / 6th May

Ayushya Mantra Japa - Rs. 70 (Rs. 2 each to 35 pandits)

Naandi Mukha Shraddh - 8 dhoti-gamchcha sets

Naandi Mukha Shraddh - Rs. 16 (Rs. 2 each to 8 pandits)

Bhojana nishkraya - Rs. 40 (Rs. 5 each to 8 pandits)

Godana nishkraya - Rs. 270 (Rs. 2 each to 135 pandits)

Mandap Bhumi Puja - Rs. 11 (to the acharya)

Vastu kalasha - Re. 1

Mandap kalasha - Rs. 18 (Re. 1 for each of these kalashas: 10 Dikpalas and 8 at the doors)

Pradhan kalasha - Rs. 5

Asankhyat Rudra kalasha - Re. 1

Yogini kalasha - Rs. 3

Kshetrapala kalasha - Re. 1

Arani Puja - Rs. 21 to the acharya

Vardhini kalasha - 9 metal kalashas (taken in the Jala Yatra) and Rs. 5 for puja

Silk pitamber, silk chadar, silk sari, silk chunari - 2 sets (for



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shodashopachara puja of
main vedi, on the first and
last day)
Dhoti-chadar for Ganesh-
Ambika
Sari-blouse for
Shodashmatrika
A gold coin - for the worship of
Saptaghrita Matrika
Sari-blouse for Saptaghrita
Matrika
Dhoti-chadar for Vastu vedi
Dhoti-chadar for Pradhan vedi
Sari-blouse for Yogini vedi
Sari-blouse for Mahakali
Sari-blouse for Mahalakshmi
Sari-blouse for Mahasaraswati
Dhoti-chadar for the
Kshetrapala vedi
Dhoti-chadar for the Graha vedi
Dhoti-chadar for Asankhyat
Rudra
For the nitya (or daily) puja
Havan samagri, or materials
from which shakalya was
prepared - (mentioned in The
Rituals/8th - 15th May)
Sahasrarchana samagri -
(mentioned in The
Rituals/8th - 15th May)
Flower garlands (10 big, 20
small), flowers, bilvapatra,
Tulsi, durva, Gangajala
Sankalpa - Re. 1

Ganesh puja - Rs. 2
Varun puja - Rs. 2
Shodasha Matrika puja - Rs. 5
Saptaghrita Matrika puja -
Rs. 5
Vastu Puja - Rs. 5
Mandap kalasha - Rs. 18
(1 each)
Mandap stambha - Rs. 16
(Re. 1 each)
Mandap dvara - Rs. 8
(Rs. 2 each)
Dvarpala - Rs. 440 (Rs. 5 each
for each of the 8 dvarpalas
for 11 days)
Pradhan kalasha - Rs. 21
Yantra Puja - Rs. 5
Kunda Puja - Rs. 55 (Rs. 5
each for 11 kundas)
Graha Puja - Rs. 5
Asankhyat Puja - Rs. 5
Yogini Puja - Rs. 5
Kshetrapala Puja - Rs. 5
Agni Puja - Rs. 5
Brahmin Puja (Kar Puja) -
Rs. 270 (Rs. 2 each for 135
pandits)
Arati Puja - Rs. 5
16th May
Purnahuti Puja - Rs. 55
(dakshina of Rs. 5 in each of
the 11 kundas)
Coconuts - 11 (1 for the
Purnahuti at each kunda)
Appropriate items for the



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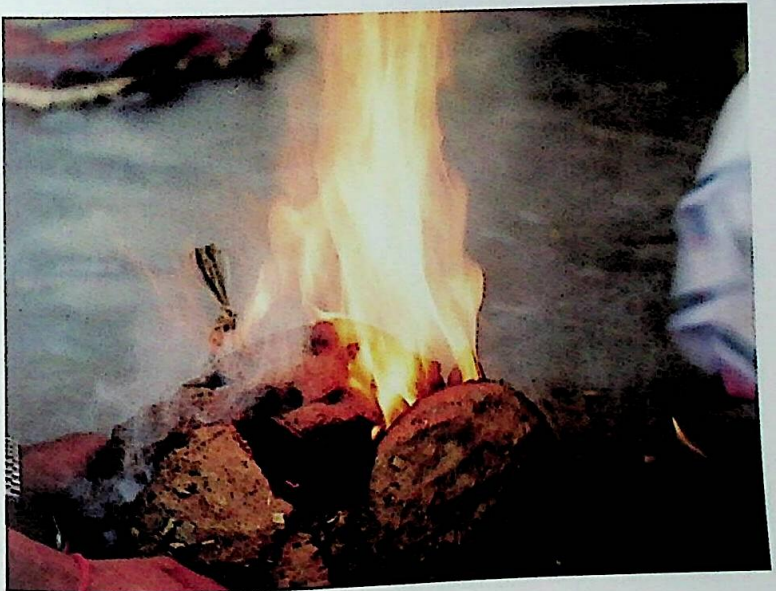
following: Ghritadana,
Svarnadana, Tildana
Ghritadana sangata - Rs. 5
(Sangata is given to cover
the cost of any shortcoming
in the dana.)
Pithdana nishkraya and
Pithdana sangata - 5 vedis
and dakshina of Rs. 21
(to the acharya)
Mandapdana nishkraya and
Mandapdana sangata -
Rs. 200 (a token dana of the
mandap to the acharya and
its sangata)
Godana nishkraya - Rs. 231
(Rs. 21 each to the 11
kundacharyas)
Vrishdana nishkraya - Rs. 231
(Rs. 21 each to the 11
brahmas)
Ashvadana nishkraya - Rs. 21
(a token amount symbolic of
the dana of a horse, given to
the sadasya)
Gantridana nishkraya - Rs. 21
(‘Gantri’ means ‘palki’; its
dana, in token form, goes to
gaanapatya.)
Bhuyasi dakshina samast -
Rs. 675 (Rs. 5 each for 135
pandits, a token amount
symbolic of dana of land)
Abhisheka samast - Rs. 675
(Rs. 5 each for 135 pandits)
Bamboo stands - 22 (for

Vasordhara)
Large banana stems - 3
(for preparing 11 channels
for the Vasordhara at each
kunda)
Ghee for Vasordhara
Black urad - 1 seer (932 gm
for khichadi)
Khicheree (prepared without
salt or turmeric) - 5 seer
(approx. 4.65 kg, for the
Dikpala and Kshetrapala
Bali)
Kooshmand - (or pumpkin, for
the Balis mentioned above)
Urad papad - 1 kg (for the
Balis mentioned above)
Curd - 1 kg (for the Balis
mentioned above)
Dhoti-chadar for the napit, or
barber, to wear when he
takes away the Balis
Shaiyya Dana - (mentioned in
The Rituals/16th May)
Shaiyya puja dakshina - Rs. 21
Shaiyya Dana sangata -
dakshina Rs. 101
Swatantra Godana -
(mentioned in The
Rituals/16th May)
Avabhrith Snana - Rs. 21
Dhoti-chadar for Avabhrith
Snana - one set each for the
acharya and yajman





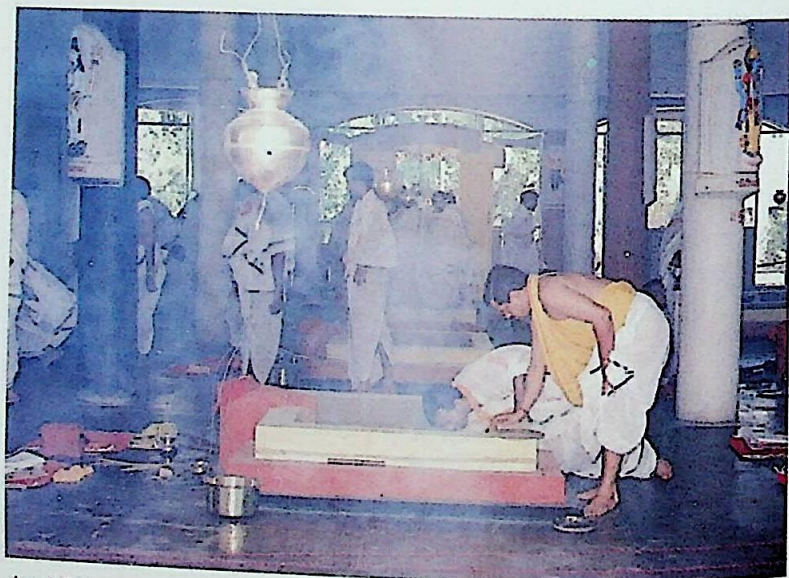
... and strengthening the flame



Agni devata



The kundacharyas wait at their kundas; the cloth covering each kunda will soon be removed and the Panchabhu Samaskara performed



Agni Sthapana

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Dakshina - (mentioned in The Rituals/16 th May)
 Brahmin Bhojana, garlands, sandalwood paste, and Re. 1 each - for the Brahmin Bhojana (mentioned in The Rituals/16th May)

Further list of things required for the pujas

Roli - 1 kg
 Abir - 1 kg
 Mica (bukka) - 250 gm
 Turmeric powder - 1 kg
 Mouli - 1 kg
 Dhoop batti
 Saffron
 Kapur - 1 big box
 Sindur - 100 gm
 Yajnopavit - 11 kori (bundles)
 Cotton wool
 Rice - 1 quintal (100 kg)
 Paan - 50 (everyday)
 Supari - 5 kg
 Daily naivedya - peda, batasha, panchameva, fruit, mishri
 Kamal gatta - 4 seer (approx. 3.75 kg)
 Guggal - 3 seer (approx. 2.75 kg)
 Bhojpatra - 1 seer (932 g)
 Cloves - 200 gm
 Cardamom - 200 gm
 Mace (javitri) - 100 gm
 Nutmeg (jaiphal) - 5
 Attar
 Gulab jal - 1 big bottle

Milk - 1 seer (everyday)
 Curd - 1.5 seer (everyday)
 Sugar - 5 seer (approx. 4.65 kg)
 Ghee
 Honey - 250 gm
 Yellow sarson - 250 gm
 Kusha - 1 big bundle
 Coconut with water - 40
 Dry coconut - 12
 Gari gola - 25
 Chandan sticks (red and white) and their stones
 Rudraksha necklaces (to be given to the ritviks)
 Red, green, yellow and black powdered colour - 25 gm each (for clouring rice to make the vedis; wheat flour makes the fifth colour)
 Pancharatna packets - to be put in the kalashas (each included gold, diamond, blue sapphire, yellow sapphire and pearl)
 Sarvaushadhi (medicinal herbs) - mura, jatamasi, bacch, koot, shilajit, amba haldi, daru haldi, kachur, champa, nagar motha, shatavar (50 gm each, to put in the kalashas)
 Saptadhan (seven kinds of grains) - kakuni, sama, dhan, jau, gehun, til, chana (placed under the kalashas)
 Saptamrittika - soil from seven



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- specific places (for the kalashas)
- Panchapallava - peepal, gular, pilkhan, bargad and mango (for the kalashas)
- Gold pieces - 56 (for the Asankhyat Rudra)
- Panchagavya (on the 5th and 6th)
- Dusters for cleaning
- Chauki (small stool) for Shiva Purana
- Wood for Navagraha Havan - 108 pieces of each of these woods for each of the 11 kundas: akvan, palash, khair, apaamarg, pipal, gular, shami, durva and kusha
- Mrigcham (deerskin) - 1 (for Arani Manthan)
- Blanket - 1 (for Arani Manthan)
- Sari with red border - 1 (for Svaha - for Arani Manthan))
- Cotton string - 10 haath long and as thick as a thumb (for Arani Manthan)
- Iron hook (with phan, or snake-like hood) - 4 (for protection of the yajnashala)
- Copper wire (to hang the abhisheka kalasha containing ghee over the fire of each kunda)
- Wooden chauki - 2 x 2 haath
- Peedha (stool) - 1 x 1.5 haath
- Yajna paatra - 11 pranita, 11 prokshani, 11 sruva, 11 sruchi, 11 sphaya, 1 arani mantha
- Shankha - 1 (for the arati)
- Ghadi ghanta - 1 (for the arati)
- Silver kalasha for main vedi with silver lid - 1
- Metal vastu kalasha with cover - 1
- Metal kshetrapala kalasha with cover - 1
- Metal yogini kalasha - 3
- Metal Rudra kalasha with cover - 1
- Ganga sagar (a copper pot with a spout) - 2 (for watering the barley seeds around the yajnashala and for abhisheka of the yajman)
- Small kalasha (copper with clay lids) - 18 (10 for the Dikpala vedis and 8 for the dvaras)
- Brass purnapaatra vessels with covers - 11
- Ajyasthali - 11 (1 for each kunda)
- Charusthali - 11 (1 for each kunda)
- Abhisheka paatra - 12 (1 for each kunda and 1 for Shivalinga)
- Kalchhul - 11 (to make charu,



1 for each kunda)
 Sandasi - 11 (to make charu, 1
 for each kunda)
 Bucket (big) - 2 (for Gangajala)
 Drum - 1 (for storing
 Gangajala)
 Parat - 2
 Tray - 5
 Glass - 11
 Thali - 17
 Katori - 20 (for keeping mishri,
 batasha, roli, rice and
 chandan)
 Rope to cordon off area where
 pandits sit
 Moonj rope - 200 haath
 (armlengths) (for tying
 around each kunda)
 String (sutli) - 1 kg
 Milk - 22 litres (for charu, 2
 litres for each kunda)
 Extra sesame, rice and barley
 (as advised by Pt.
 Vamadeva)
 Big mirror - 1 (for pradhan
 vedi)
 Small ghungroos - 50 (for
 mahadhvaj)
 Pratima of main devata - Shiv
 with Parvati and Ganesh in
 gold, Nandi in silver
 Vastu pratima - 1
 Kshetrapala pratima - 1
 Mahalakshmi, Mahakali and
 Mahasaraswati pratima - 1

each
 Rudra pratima - 1
 Gold shalaka - 1 (This small
 stick is used to draw a
 yantra on a silver plate that
 is placed on the pradhan
 kalasha)
 Narmadeshvara with argha - 1
 Big picture of Shiva parivar - 1
 (to hang behind main vedi)
 Pictures of other devatas - 36
 (to hang on the pillars)
 Silver katori - 1 (for bhog of
 main vedi)
 Silver tashtari (big) - 1 (for
 bhog of main vedi)
 Silver simhasana with silver
 chhatra - 1 (for the pradhan
 devata)
 Small simhasanas without
 chhatra - 6
 Chanvar - 1
 Puja vessels - parat (for
 abhisheka of
 Narmadeshvara), tripadi, jal
 shankha, pushpapaatra,
 arati and deepdana,
 chandan katori, etc.
 Bundles (thaan) of red, yellow,
 green, black and white cloth
 - 2 each (for the dhvaj and
 pataka)
 Bamboo poles - 20 (each 10
 haath long, for the flags on



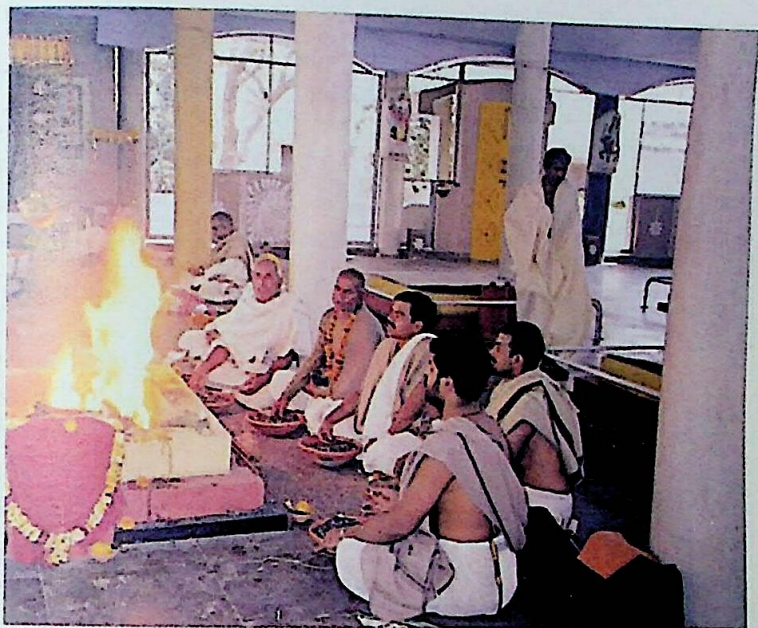
the roof of the yajnashala)

Bamboo pole - 1 (32 haath
long, for the mahadhvaj)
Banana trees - 16 (on either
side of the doors, gate etc.)
Bamboo baskets - 5
Clay kadhais - (for mixing rice
grains with powdered
colour, and for keeping

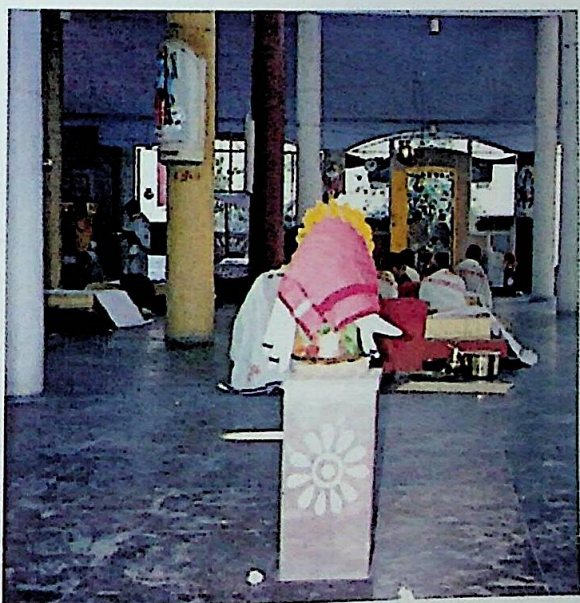
shakalya at the kundas)

Pattal, sakora and kulhar -
1000 each
Bandhanvar - for decorating
the yajnashala
Cloth hangings (chandova)
over the vedis
Gota (gold trimmings) - 500 m





Havan in progress



A dikpala vedi



The purna ready for ahuti



The Purnahuti

Sankalpa

śrigaṇeśāya namaḥ

hari om tatsat viṣṇurviṣṇurviṣṇuḥ srimadanantaviryasya
 srimadbhagavato mahapurusaḥ acintyāparimitaśaktyā
 dhriyamāṇasya mahājalaughamadhye
 paribhramamāṇānāmanekakoṭibrahmāṇḍānāmekatame
 avyaktamahadahamkāra
 pṛthivyaptejovāyvakāśādyāvaraṇairāvṛte asmin mahati
 brahmāṇḍakhaṇḍayormadhye
 ādhārasaktiśrīmadādivārāhadamṣṭrāgravirājite
 anantādīmahānāgairdhriyamāṇe airāvatādidiggaḥopari
 pratiṣṭhite saptapātāloparibhāge
 bhūlokaḍisaptalokaṇāmādhobhāge mahākālāyamānaśeṣasya
 sahasraphaṇāmaṇimaṇḍite digdantiṣuṇḍottambhite
 lokālokalavalayite
 lavaṇekṣurasasurāsarpidadhikṣīrodakārṇavaparivṛte
 jambuplakṣaśālmaliḥśakrauñcaśākapuṣkarasaptadvīpayute
 indrakāmsyatāmragabhastināgasauṃyagandharva-
 cāraṇabhāratādinavakhaṇḍamaṇḍite bhāratavarṣe
 bhāratākhaṇḍe ayodhyāmathurāmāyākāśīkāñcyavantikā-
 dvārāvātī-saptapurī-pratiṣṭhite kurukṣetra
 puṣkarādinānātirthayuktakarmabhūmau
 samabhūmadhyarekhāyāḥ pūrvadigbhāge bhāgīrathyāḥ
 paścime tīre jagatstraṣṭuḥ parārddhadvayajivino brahmaṇo
 dvitīye parārddhe ekapañcāśattame varṣe prathamamāse
 prathamapakṣe prathamadivase ahno dvitīye yāme tṛtīye
 muhūrte rathantarādidvātrimśatkalpānām madhye aṣṭame
 śvetavārāhakalpe svāyambhuvādimanvantarāṇām madhye
 saptame vaivasvatamanvantare kṛtatretā
 dvāparakalīsamjñākanām caturṇām yugānām madhye
 vartamāne aṣṭāvīmśatitame kaliyuge kaliprathamacarāṇe
 bauddhāvātāre aṣṭātrimśadadhikadvisahastratame
 vaikramīye'bde (2038) tryadhikaikonaviṃśatisatātame sāke
 śalivāhaniye (1903) prabhavādiṣaṣṭi samvatsarāṇām madhye



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bhāvanāmni samvatsare śrīsūrye uttarāyaṇe vasantaṛtau
 māsottame vaiśākhmāse śubhe śuklapakṣe tṛtīyāyām
 śubhatithau budhavāsare rohiṇīnāmni nakṣatre atigaṇḍayoge
 taitilakaraṇe vṛṣabharāśisthite candre meṣarāśisthite śrīsūrye
 kanyārāśisthite devagurau śeṣeṣu graheṣu yathā yathā
 rāśisthānasthiteṣu satsu evaṁ grahaguṇānaviśiṣḍe
 māyāpuryāntargatakanakhale tīrthe mātuh ānandamayyāḥ
 āśrame amukagotraḥ amukaśarmā'haṁ
 samastāśramasthajanānāṇ pratinidhibhūto'haṁ
 samastajanānām āyurārogyaiśvaryaprāptyarthaṁ
 viśvakalyāṇārthaṁ kariṣyamāṇa
 homātmakātirudrayāgakarmāṅgabhūtaṁ
 yathālabdhopacāradravyaiḥ śrībhavānīśaṅkarayoḥ āvāhanam
 sthāpanam pūjanam ca kariṣye ।

Obeisance to Shri Ganesha!

Hari Om, That which is of the nature of Truth, Vishnu,
 Vishnu, Vishnu! By the inconceivable, immeasurable Power
 of the Omnipotent, the Support, Shri Bhagavan, the
 Supreme Being, in the centre of the Great Ocean; in one of
 the many crores of Universes which are moving in the centre
 of the Great Ocean; obscured by the coverings of Primordial
 Matter, the Primal Element, Ahamkara, Earth, Water, Fire,
 Air, Ether; resting on the ends of the tusks of Shri Adi
 Varaha, who is its Foundational Strength; upheld by the
 Great Nagas like Ananta etc.; firmly placed on the Great
 Elephants like Airavata etc.; on the topmost part of the
 Seven Patalas and on the lowermost part of Bhuloka etc., the
 Seven Lokas; illumined by the jewels on the thousands of
 hoods of Shesha who is like Mahakala; held aloft by the
 trunks of the Elephants of the Directions; surrounded by
 mountains like Loka and Aloka; encircled by oceans of salt,
 sugarcane juice, honey, ghee, curd, milk and water;
 conjoined by the Seven Islands of Jambu, Plaksha, Shalmali,
 Kusha, Krauncha, Shaka, Pushkara; adorned by the Nine



om namo bhagavate rudrāya

Divisions named Indra, Kansya, Tamra, Gabhasti, Naga, Saumya, Gandharva, Charana, Bharata etc.; in the division of Bharata in Bharatavarsha; conjoined by the Seven Cities of Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya, Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika, Dvarika etc.; in the Karma Bhumi with various Tirthas like Kurukshetra, Pushkara etc.; to the north of the Equator; on the western bank of the Bhagirathi; in the second Parardha of the Brahma who lives for two Parardhas; in the fifty-first year, first paksha, first day, second yama of the day, third muhurata; in the eighth Svetavaraha kalpa during the Rathantara etc. thirty two Kalpas; in the seventh Vaivasvata manvantara during the Svayambhu etc. manvantaras; in the present twenty-eighth Kaliyuga during the fourfold yugas named Krita, Treta, Dvapara and Kali; in the first charana of Kaliyuga; during the period of the incarnation of Buddha; in two-thousand-sixty-eighth year of the Vikram Samvatsar; in the nineteen-hundred-and-third Shaka Shalivahana samvatsar; in the samvatsara named Bhava of the Prabhava etc. sixty samvatsaras; during the uttarayana of Shri Surya; during the finest month of Vaishakha of Vasant Ritu; during the auspicious shuklapaksha; during the auspicious third tithi; on Wednesday; on Rohini nakshatra, Atiganda yoga, Taitila karana; with Moon in Taurus, Sun in Aries, Jupiter in Virgo, other planets in their particular places, and during the time qualified by such planetary placements; in Kankhal tirtha within Mayapuri; in Ma Anandamayee's Ashram; I, —
 ———— Sharma, of ———— gotra, representing all members of the Ashram, for obtaining the longevity, health and prosperity of all people and for universal welfare, will, with whatever upachara and dravya is available as part of this homatmak (havanatmak) Atirudra Yaag (yajna), invite, establish and worship Shri Bhavani-Shankara.



om namo bhagavate rudrāya



Anandamayee Ma – a brief life sketch

Anandamayee Ma was born on the 30th of April 1896, in Kheora village in present day Bangladesh. She was named Nirmala Sundari Devi at birth. Her family was traditional and pious, and of very modest means. Her father, Bipin Behari Bhattacharya, was well known for his singing of Vaishnava songs. Her mother, Mokshada Sundari Devi, was also spiritually much evolved and often had visions of divine beings. Later on, she took the vows of renunciation.

Nirmala Devi was a happy and obedient child, much loved by everyone in the village. She had very little schooling and was, in the formal sense, unlettered. She was, however, acutely sensitive to anything religious. Listening to kirtan would send Her into spiritual ecstasy. She often seemed distracted, as if She was in a world of Her own. These and certain other aspects of Her behaviour seemed quite inexplicable to those around Her. It was only much later that people realised that these were indicative of the divinity She embodied.

In 1901, when She was barely 13, Nirmala Devi was married to Sri Ramani Mohan Chakravarti (later known as Bholanathji). For some years, She lived with Her



husband's elder brother's family. She diligently attended to all household chores that now became Her responsibility. People were surprised at such exemplary behaviour in one so young. They did not realize that Her cheer and equanimity were the result of Her exalted state and that She was not affected by events and circumstances like ordinary human beings. Yet, She had a playful sense of humour, totally free of malice, and a genuine compassion that reached out to everyone.

In 1914, Nirmala Devi came to live with Her husband in Ashtagram where he was working. Their relationship remained entirely celibate throughout. In Ashtagram, many around Her were struck by Her ever-blissful mood. It was here that someone first addressed Her as 'Ma' and someone else prophesied that one day everyone would address Her in that way.

In 1918, Bholanathji was transferred to Bajitpur and Ma followed him there. One day She had the 'kheyal' that She should do 'lila' and play the role of a sadhaka. Innumerable aspects and stages of various sadhanas revealed themselves through her being. She spontaneously repeated mantras and prayers, went into samadhi for long periods, went through various asanas, mudras and other physical transformations. None of these had ever been learnt from a guru or a book. They all occurred by inner inspiration. In 1922, She underwent an initiation process, in which She herself was the guru and She the disciple. A period of mauna marked the end of Her 'lila' of sadhana. During this time, Bholanathji was convinced that She was no ordinary human being. He himself took initiation from Her.



Ma and Bholanathji now shifted to Dhaka. News of Her spiritual powers began to spread. Many who came to visit Her witnessed Her ecstatic bhava during kirtan and withdrawal into samadhi. From 1927, Ma and Bholanathji began to travel frequently to places of pilgrimage. In 1932 they left Dhaka altogether. They went to Raipur, near Dehra Dun, where Bholanathji immersed himself in intense sadhana. As time passed, Ma's circle of devotees grew larger.

In 1938, Bholanathji passed away. Ma was not in the least distressed for She said that in the realm of Immortality there was neither death nor loss. She continued with Her travels, visiting many villages, towns, and cities throughout India.

Huge crowds continued to collect wherever She went. Ordinary as well as highly placed people came to see Her. She met them all with equal kindness and affection. Kirtans, pujas and religious and philosophical discussions were conducted in Her presence and often with Her participation. Ashrams came up in Her name in many places. Ma gave detailed instructions, in strict accordance with the shastras, on how life should be lived in these ashrams. Many devotees wanting to dedicate themselves to the spiritual life began to live in these ashrams.

Religious functions like Bhagavat Saptah, Durga Puja, Chandi Path, Samyam Saptah, and Saraswati Puja were organised regularly by Her devotees. Orthodox heads of Hindu religious organisations, despite their traditional hesitation in accepting a woman as religious authority, realised Her uniqueness. Ma never gave discourses or wrote any books. Giving simple answers to earnest





The Vasordhara



Pt. Vamadeva (the acharya), Br. Sanandan (the yajman), and several ritviks accompany the main kalasha (being carried by Pt. Patanjali Mishra) for Deva Visarjan at the end of the yajna

questions was her method of communicating with seekers. Of course, there were the non-verbal forms also, of which only She has knowledge. In Her simple words, the learned discovered the most profound philosophies, and the troubled soul an answer to his mundane problems.

For some time before She took final samadhi, Ma had begun to withdraw Herself from the public. She had also begun to keep indifferent health. The Atirudra Mahayajna took place during this period. Some time later Ma remarked that Her body had no illness but that it was being recalled toward the Unmanifest. Ma left her physical body on the 27th of August 1982, in the Kishenpur Ashram in Dehra Dun. Ma's physical body was brought by road in a procession to Kankhal. Hundreds of people and Mahatmas from all the monastic orders of Hardwar came to pay their homage to Her.

Her Samadhi Mandir, called the Jyotir Mandir, is situated in Her Ashram in Kankhal. Puja is performed there everyday.



Diagram of the **yagyashala** showing its main features.
(Not drawn to scale.)

— Torana

Walls of the
yagyashala

| Door

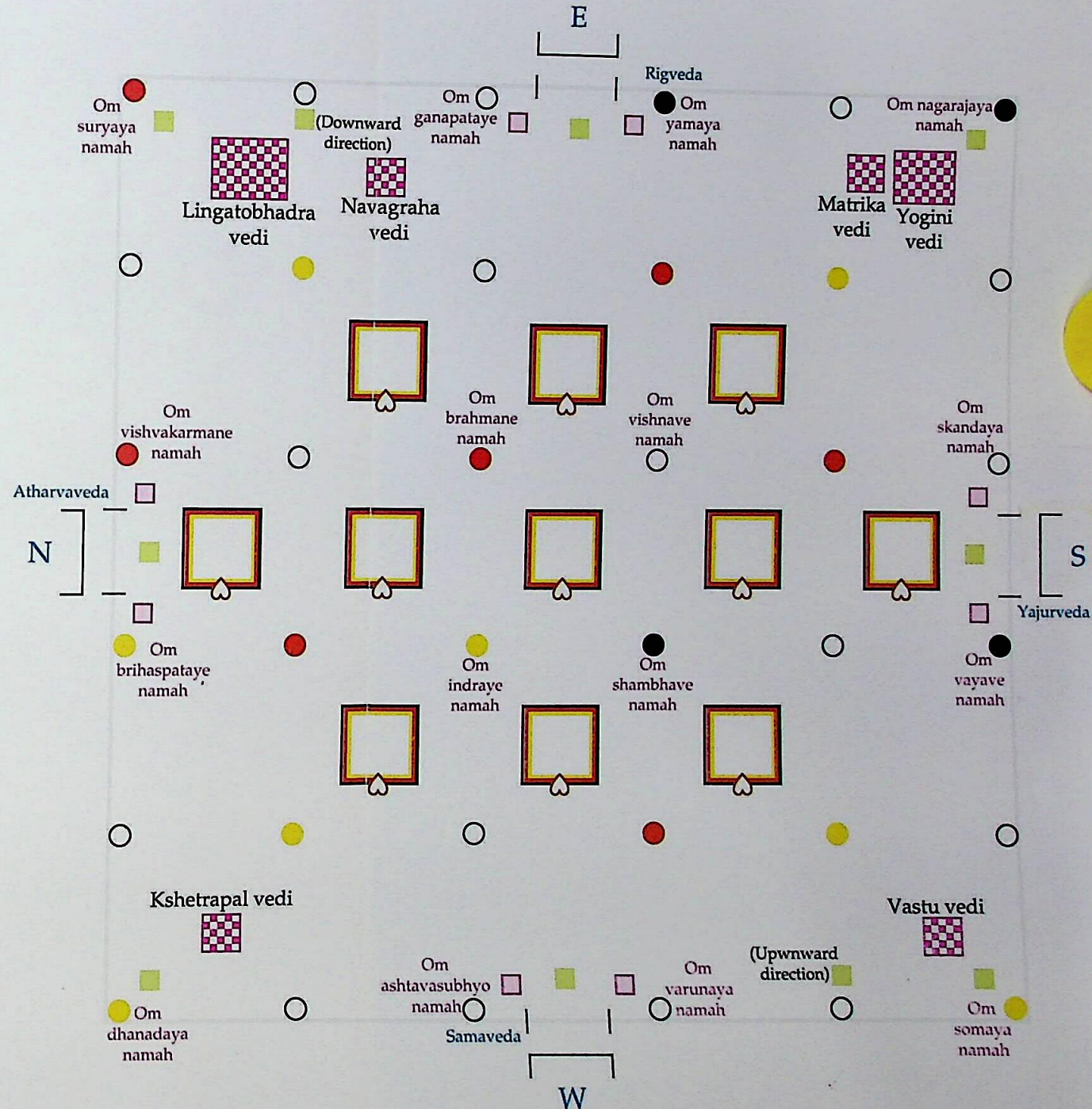
Dikpala
vedi

□ Stand for kalasha

▣ Vedi

□ Kunda
and yoni

○ Pillars (in white and
other colours) - the 16 main pillars
have the mantra of their devata
written near them in the diagram.
In the yagyashala the mantra
and image of the appropriate
devata decorate the main pillars.



An Atirudra Mahayajna was conducted in Kankhal in 1981, in the divine presence of Shri Shri Anandamayee Ma. Conducted for the welfare of the entire Universe, the Yajna adhered strictly to the rules of the Shastras. This book gives an account of the Yajna from its conception to its completion. It includes details of the planning and preparation, the materials and articles used, the events that occurred during its progress and the various rituals and their significance that formed a part of this eleven-day function.

The main deity of the Yajna was Rudra, who has two forms: fierce and compassionate. Both forms are beneficial and both were worshipped during this Yajna.

